University of Alberta

REFLECTIONS OF BIBLICAL AND HAGIOGRAPHICAL WRITINGS IN SELECTED POST-SOVIET FICTION

by

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Abstract

This thesis examines hagiographical and Biblical reflections in selected works of post-Soviet fiction. It is based on a comparative analysis of several Old Slavic saints' lives with the narratives of Tatiana Tolstaia, Liudmila Petrushevskaia, and Viktor Erofeev, which is undertaken to draw connections between the literatures of these distant epochs. It looks at the ways these writers employ the themes of suffering, self-sacrifice, death, and non-resistance to evil in their works. Attention is given to exploration of meaning of suffering in Russian spirituality as well as the phenomenon of holy foolishness and its characteristics. Chapter 1 is an analysis of Tolstaia's "Sonia," which demonstrates the resemblance of the story's protagonist to representatives of the holy fools. Chapter 2 considers suffering and self-sacrifice, as essential components of Christian asceticism, in Petrushevskaia's "Our Crowd". Chapter 3 revisits hagiographical and Biblical concepts of suffering, death, and non-resistance to evil, in Erofeev's story "Galoshes."

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NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

The transliteration system used throughout this thesis is that of the Library of Congress, except for direct quotations from translated texts where the original transliteration system is preserved. Furthermore, I will use the commonly accepted English forms for such authors as Gogol, Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, and Gorky who are well known to the English-speaking world.

Introduction

The purpose of this study to demonstrate that post-Soviet literature has inherited the traditions of much earlier hagiographical writings and a number of postmodernist Russian writers draw their plots, characters, and ideas from the Holy Scripture and saints' lives. Even when plots are not directly derived from the Bible and hagiographical literature, these writings apparently have provided a commonly understood source of symbols and themes. I shall attempt to establish connections and links between medieval and contemporary Russian literature through an analysis of selected narratives of Tatiana Tolstaia, Liudmila Petrushevskaia, and Viktor Erofeev against background of Scripture and hagiographical literature.

Examining the possible factors that facilitated an interest in religion and, more specifically, in the literature describing saints' lives, I propose that the resurgence of the traditions of hagiography in the writings of post-Soviet Russian writers is ultimately related to the changes in Russian society over the last two decades. Nowadays, as Inna Naletova accurately observes, "one can see a move in Russian society towards a rethinking of the past, a looking at the past in light of the present, giving rise to a need to recover the symbolism of the older order of things and connect it to the new" (1). For more than seventy years, during the Soviet regime, the church was subjected to substantial pressure, control, and outright persecution. In recent years, it has re-acquired a considerable social authority, and people's respect and trust. As a result, many Russian historians, writers, artists, and political figures are experiencing a renewed interest in the religious traditions of their

past.

The story of creating of a new national hymn of Russia evokes a vivid example of those surprising developments (Naletova 2). The new hymn of the Russian Federation was adopted in 2000 with the approval of President Vladimir Putin and replaced the former anthem. Basically, it represents a reintroduction of the music of the old Soviet anthem, but with lyrics revised by its original writer Sergei Mikhalkov. The following changes have been made: he added the words "священная наша держава"[1] [our sacred state] to the first line of the anthem and ended the second verse with the words "Хранимая Богом родная земля" [God-preserved native land]. This is a clear indication of an ideological shift in which the notion of religion has finally found a modern-day political acceptance contrary to the goal of the preceding communist state to eradicate religion from the consciousness of the Russian people.

Parallel to changes in the political landscape there was a simultaneous thaw in the literary status quo that had been established by the political will of the state, and whose manifestation becomes the re-emergence of religious motifs, symbols, and themes in secular post-Soviet literature. Maria Remizova in her article "...ili zhdat' nam drugogo?" points out that nowadays "в отечественной словесности вдруг сделалась популярной религиозная тема" [in our literature the religious theme has suddenly acquired popularity] (183). She attributes this revival of religious themes, images, and concepts in the post-Soviet Russian writings to the

[1] Unless otherwise stated, all translations from the original languages are mine (T.K).

deep search for the spiritual ideals in contemporary society. Having analyzed the most recent Russian writings, the author concludes that contemporary prose has finally broken up the circle of materialism: Russian literature today revisits the eternal ideas of human existence and widely employs the typological heroes from sacred writings in direct or transmuted forms (Remizova 190). She particularly examines the novels by E. Kaminskii *Chodotvorets*, V. Skrypkin *Tinga*, and V. Sharov *Voskreshenije Lazaria* for the presence of religious discourse.

My research is intended to join the discussion on the influence of hagiographical and Biblical writings on contemporary Russian writers. Moreover, I would like to extend this study area by inclusion of post-Soviet Russian writers, the representatives of postmodernist literary trend into the gallery of successors of the medieval hagiographical heritage. I shall show that similar to early hagiographical writings, the works of post-Soviet writers address the concepts of non-resistance to evil, forgiveness, meekness, and self-sacrifice as values that, unfortunately, have been abandoned in the contemporary world. While not always explicitly expressed in the texts, these ideas constitute an essential part of the subtexts and bear a symbolic significance for those narratives.

The heritage of medieval hagiography, the multifarious literature devoted to saints, was much more important for Russian literature than is often recognized. Though there have been a number of comprehensive studies conducted to explore the influence of Biblical and hagiographical writings on the individual Russian literary works of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, I believe that the

research devoted to those traditions in contemporary post-Soviet Russian literature is limited to sporadic articles by a few scholars. Since my thesis employs some of the definitions and views outlined in critical works by other researchers, I consider it important to provide a brief overview of critical studies dealing with the usage of hagiographical traditions in Russian literature.

Margaret Ziolkowski was one of the first scholars to describe the vast extent of the impact of hagiography on the prominent Russian writers of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century and their works. Her book *Hagiography and Modern Russian Literature* (1988) is an exploration and analysis of the most common types of usage of hagiographical material by Alexandr Pushkin, Nikolai Gogol, Aleksei K. Tolstoy, Feodor Dostoevsky, Leo Tolstoy, Nikolai Leskov, Alexandr Herzen, Chernyshevsky, Maxim Gorky, and Yurii Pasternak.

Ziolkowski emphasizes the long-lasting importance of the figure of the saint for Russian culture and investigates the peculiarities of the use of hagiographical motifs, imagery, and typological heroes by those writers, as well as the variety of purposes that inspired this exploitation of their cultural past. The author examines "the most common usages of hagiographical material by those writers, as well as the variety of purposes that inspired this exploitation of their cultural past" (Ziolkowski ix).

For my research, the particularly important aspect is addressed in the chapter "Neo-hagiography: the Saintly Monk and the Holy Fool in Modern Dress", which is devoted to analysis of works containing the images of holy fools (*iurodivye*) in

nineteenth century Russian literature. According to Ziolkowski, holy foolishness is one of the types of sanctity, which has occupied an important position among Russian saints since the Muscovite period (132). She briefly describes the distinguishing characteristics and spiritual features of the holy fool in the works of medieval writers and Pushkin's *Boris Godunov*, Leo Tolstoy's *Childhood*, as well as in some of Dostoevsky's novels. She has also touched upon the origin and meaning of kenoticism (the imitation of Christ's extraordinary humility) as a form of Russian asceticism, practiced by the holy fools.

Ewa M. Thompson's book *Understanding Russia: The Holy Fool in Russian Culture* (1987) is another important study, to which I shall frequently refer in my thesis. She investigates the phenomenon of holy foolishness, its representation in hagiography and the wide use of this image or its characteristics in Russian literature. The author argues that the "holy fool type" is essential to an understanding of Russian culture and religion. Having shown the pervasiveness of the holy fool ideal in Russian culture, Thompson turns to a discussion of Russian literature, where, as she demonstrates, holy fools play a significant role as well. In her view, in literature, the holy fool is romanticized and "often made a voice for Holy Russia", as in Pushkin's *Boris Godunov* and in some of Tolstoy's works (12).

More importantly, however, is the "stylized holy fool", employed in the modern Russian literature. In Thompson's view, the "stylized holy fool" brings the essence of the holy foolishness into more conventional settings. Thompson argues that Pierre Bezukhov in Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace* and Yurii Zhivago in

Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago* are stylized holy fools, and she discusses features of those characters that are similar to the ones of the holy fools.

The book by Marcia A. Morris *Saints and Revolutionaries* (1993) also focuses on connections between the medieval and contemporary Russian literature. It is devoted to an examination of re-emergence of the ascetic hero in the literary works of Gogol, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Chernyshevsky, and Ostrovsky. The author claims that "an entire group of saints' lives traceable to the medieval tradition as well as numerous novels and stories coming out of the modern period share the same type of hero, the hero we will refer as the ascetic" (2). Moreover, the convergences between these literary works, according to Morris, surpass the type of the hero chosen: their structure and poetics are found to be surprisingly similar as well.

Morris places the works including *Kievan Crypt Patericon* and *The Life of Avraamii Smolenskii,* and the other saints' lives of the Old Slavic literature, in the context of religious doctrines of "apocalypticism" and "deification." The author traces a revival of the Russian interest to the themes of the apocalypse and perfectionism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The novels of the Socialist Realist tradition are examined to demonstrate the underlying reflection of these intellectual traditions in modern Russian literature. Morris particularly explores the manifestation of asceticism in Kataev's *Time Forward!*, Ostrovsky's *How the Steel Was Tempered*, Gorky's *Mother*, and Chernyshevsky's *What is to Be Done*, analyzing the convergences and differences in the representation of the ascetic hero or its type.

Another valuable source of reference in my research has been Harriet Murav's *Holy Foolishness: Dostoevsky's Novels. The Poetics of Cultural Critique* (1992), which is devoted to examination of the holy fool image, as first, originated in the hagiographical texts, and subsequently, developed in the literary works of Feodor Dostoevsky. The author explores in particular its transformation in *Crime and Punishment*, *The Brothers Karamazov*, and *The Idiot*. The importance of this study for my thesis is due to Murav's efforts to identify and describe the special status and distinct characteristics of holy foolishness as a sanctified way of life in the Orthodox Church. She offers a valuable discussion on the meaning of holy foolishness as a type of sanctity in hagiographical writings. She states, that according to the hagiographer, "the business of the holy fool, and that of all the other saints, is to imitate Christ", and the distinguishing characteristic of the holy fool is "his acceptance of suffering and humiliation, which he deliberately provokes by his (seeming) act of folly" (Murav 2).

Murav demonstrates how hagiographical representation of the holy fool influences Dostoevsky's unique form of novelistic experimentation (171). The author provides the insight into the cultural phenomenon of holy foolishness, though, acknowledges that there is "no single cultural type of the holy fool" (*Ibid*).

The other studies that are directly relevant to my work have been conducted by Svitlana Kobets. She is one of those few critics, who would look at traditions of hagiography in the most recent Russian writings. Her encyclopedia article on *iurodstvo* (holy foolishness) as well as her exploration of religious traditions in the

works of Alexander Solzhenytsyn, Svitlana Vasilenko, and Valerii Shevchuk have served as a valuable source of knowledge and inspiration for my thesis. Her article "The Subject of Christian Asceticism in Alexander Solzhenytsyn *One Day In The Life Of Ivan Denisovich*" brings forward the important idea that Christian asceticism has always served Russian writers as a rich source of ideas, images, literary themes, and techniques, and "the representatives of different types of Russian Christian asceticism (saintly monks, hermits, pilgrims, holy fools, etc.) populate the pages of Russian classics" (661). She offers in this article one of the more recent examples of the representation of the ascetic type in the Russian literature. She analyzes how Alexander Solzhenitsyn continues the exploration of the ideas and practice of Christian asceticism. Kobets argues that, in many of his works, Solzhenitsyn portrays situations where men and women "who have been subjected to extremes of poverty, disease, human cruelty, and oppression" demonstrate "the ascetic mode of thought and behavior" (662). The scholar conducts a thorough examination of Christian topoi in *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich.* She draws a parallel between the heroes of Solzhenytsyn's stories and the saints' lives characters, linking the martyrs of past and present. The most valuable asset of this study is her attempt to define the kenotic idea as a source of Christian asceticism and to discuss its components, namely meekness, self-abasement, voluntary poverty, humility, obedience, "non-resistance," acceptance of suffering and death (662). I shall employ this her definition in my work.

Another example of Kobets' exploration of hagiographical traditions in

today's Russian literature is presented in her article titled "From Fool to Mother to Savior: The Poetics of Russian Orthodox Christianity and Folklore in Svetlana Vasilenko's Novel-Vita Little Fool." Here Kobets affirms that *Little Fool*, having as its central character a fool for Christ, is basically a narrative about Russia's salvation by a woman. Kobets explores the Orthodox Christian aspect of Vasilenko's female savior, as a holy fool, as a mother, and as a Mother-of-God figure in order to provide a key to the overall textual meaning. Her analysis of the novel-vita has revealed that Vasilenko implements the salvation of Russia and the salvation of the world in a traditionally Christian way.

It is evident from this brief overview that the ties between Old East Slavic hagiography and contemporary Russian literature remain to be a point of interest for Russian and Western scholars. My study attempts to prove that the prose of the post-Soviet writers can be explored from this perspective as well, and the detailed analysis of the selected narratives by Tatiana Tolstaia, Liudmila Petrushevskaia and Viktor Erofeev will illustrate my point of view.

Among hagiographical traditions employed by those writers, the image of the holy fool occupies a central place. A brief overview of this phenomenon is necessary, as holy foolishness has found its reflection in the works of both Tatiana Tolstaia and Liudmila Petrushevskaia.

Holy foolishness (or *iurodstvo*) is often described by scholars as a peculiar form of Eastern Orthodox asceticism (Fedotov 113, Kobets "Foolishness in Christ" 337, Ziolkowski 126). The phenomenology of holy foolishness and its

representation in hagiography, according to Margaret Ziolkowski, was venerated, reaching full development in fifth-century Byzantium and then again in fourteenth-century Russia (132).

A scholar of Russian spirituality, George Fedotov states in his study *The Russian Religious Mind*, that the climax of this phenomenon comes in the sixteenth century, and "it has never since been abandoned by the Russian people" (316). Fedotov calls the existence led by the holy fool "the most radical form of Christian kenoticism" (321). Kenoticism is generally defined as "the imitation of Christ's extraordinary humility" (Ziolkowski, 126) and it has always been, according to Fedotov, the dominant motif of Russian spirituality (94-131).

Kobets, in her article "The Subtext of Christian Asceticism in Aleksander Solzhenitsyn's *One Day In The Life Of Ivan Denisovich*, specifies that the kenotic idea, which is the source of all Christian asceticism, comprises "meekness, self-abasement, voluntary poverty, humility, obedience, non-resistance and the acceptance of suffering and death" (662). These components of the kenotic mode, according to Kobets, provide the individual with a means for purifying his heart and therefore bringing himself closer to God ("The Subject of Christian Asceticism" 661). Metropolitan Filaret (Drozdov, 1782-1867) of Moscow is known to always refer to the kenotic passage in Philippians in his Christmas sermons on the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, and archimandrite Alexis Bukharev (1822-1871) advised Russian people to follow the "humiliated Lamb" and led his own life as a *fool for Christ* (Webster par.5). Kenotic features were popular among holy fools and the

central principle of both holy foolishness and kenotic monasticism is "self-humiliation as the path to spiritual salvation" (Ziolkowski 132).

The Greek term for the ascetic exploit of foolishness in Christ is *salos*, which means "mentally deranged" (Kobets, "Iurodstvo" par. 3). The Greek Church, as George Fedotov states, has canonized six holy fools (*saloi*) (v.2, 316). Russians have their term for this phenomenon, *iurodivyi,* which derives from the Russian word *urod,* meaning "ugly, crippled, or an individual with congenital defects" (Kobets "Iurodstvo" par.3). Another synonym for this word in Russian is "blazhennyi" that means blessed by God or a holy person. In modern Russian, according to Kobets, "*iurodivyi*" has acquired the meaning of "a simpleton, someone who pretends to be a fool with the purpose to make his point, someone, who often displays unorthodox behavior, and trespasses against social conventions" ("Iurodstvo" par. 4). According to Fedotov, holy foolishness became in Russia "the most popular, a truly national form of ascetic life" (v. 2 317)

The Biblical inspiration for holy foolishness, as the majority of scholars have noted, comes from St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians:

> Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise (3:18)[2].
> For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe (1:21)
> We are all fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ (4:10)

The phenomenon of holy foolishness is widely employed by some contemporary Russian writers: Svitlana Vasilenko's novel-vita *Little Fool*, Sasha

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[2] I shall use the King James Version of *The Holy Bible* wherever Biblical verses are quoted.

Sokolov's *A School For Fools*, Venedikt Erofeev's *Moscow to the End of the Line* are critically discussed as works where the cultural archetype of holy foolishness has served as a basis for the narratives' protagonists.

My thesis includes an Introduction, three Chapters and a Conclusion, summarizing the results of my investigation.

Chapter 1 is devoted to an analysis of the hagiographical and Biblical elements in the short story of Tatiana Tolstaia "Sonia" ("Соня"). I shall look at the traditional hagiographical motifs of suffering, self-sacrifice, and death in this narrative and compare them to selected hagiographical texts, namely *The Tale of Juliania Osorgina* and *The Life of Blessed Xenia of St. Petersburg.* In discussing holy foolishness in this context, I shall employ the definitions developed by Svitlana Kobets, George Fedotov, Margaret Ziolkowski, Harriet Murav as well as the Biblical interpretation for holy foolishness in I Corinthians. Subsequently, I shall describe the particular instances in the content of the story, which will illustrate the convergence between Tolstaia's story and the texts of hagiographical writings. I shall attempt to demonstrate that Tolstaia's protagonist Sonia is a contemporary transformation of the holy fool image, which she remarkably resembles by her external characteristics, mode of being, and position in a society.

Chapter 2 examines hagiographical and Biblical topoi in a complex but outstanding narrative by the post-Soviet Russian writer Liudmila Petrushevskaia, "Our Crowd" ("Свой Круг"). This chapter provides a discussion on the meaning of suffering and self-sacrifice in Russian spirituality, as it is essential for understanding

the story's symbolic subtexts as well as offers the possible reasons for the reference to the theme of voluntary acceptance of suffering in Petrushevskaia's literary work.

Suffering and self-sacrifice as essential components of Christian asceticism are reflected as Christian values in all hagiographical writings from the medieval period, and in this chapter I shall refer to "The Martyrdom of Boris and Gleb" ("Сказание о Борисе и Глебе"), which narrates the story of two Russian princes, Boris and Gleb, who were proclaimed the first Russian saints for their "innocent suffering" and non-resistance to violence.

I shall analyze the image of the protagonist-narrator, which is a central image in "Our Crowd" and hence is associated with a number of religious motifs and imagery. Although hagiographical and Biblical allusions in this narrative have not, to my knowledge, been explicitly discussed by scholars, James Halliday argues in the beginning of his article titled "Liudmila Petrushevskaia's 'Svoi Krug'" that "the treatment of the religious motif" in "Svoi Krug" might have been one of the reasons that this story "was deemed unsuitable for publication before *glasnost'*" (41). My analysis aims to uncover and interpret those particular instances of use of hagiographical and scriptural themes, motifs, and imagery in Petrushevskaia's "Our Crowd," namely the motifs of suffering, self-sacrifice, illness, and death, as well as the theme of immortality after physical death. I also propose in this chapter that the protagonist's role in "Our Crowd" is reminiscent of the one of a holy fool represented in Old Russian hagiography and Russian literature of various times.

It is noteworthy to clarify here that my thesis considers primarily those characteristics of the protagonists, which are convergent with the virtues exemplified by the archetypal heroes of hagiographical and scriptural writings. While acknowledging the presence of other dimensions in the protagonists and motifs in the examined narratives that do not constitute a part of the Christian mode of being, these are not the focus of my research for this thesis. My intention is to trace and interpret the employment of Christian topoi in the stories of Petrushevskaia, Tolstaia, and Erofeev.

Finally, my third chapter is devoted to a discussion on how another postmodernist writer and literary critic, Viktor Erofeev, revisits hagiographical and Biblical concepts of non-resistance to violence, suffering, forgiveness, and death in his short story "Galoshes" ("Галоши"). I attempt to prove that this narrative can be considered a contemporary "adaptation from the medieval genre of saints' lives" as Deming Brown briefly notes in *The Last Years of Soviet Russian Literature* (168). I focus in greater detail on the transformation of the Biblical and hagiographical image of the martyr, given in Erofeev's story to an innocent child opposing to the contemporary "world of evil." I also consider the connection of Erofeev's short story Christian topoi with hagiographical and religious subtexts in the narrative of nineteenth-century Russian writer Nikolai Gogol "The Overcoat".

The theoretical premises my thesis is based mainly on are found in the articles by Riccardo Picchio, Ziva Ben-Porat, Julia Kristeva, and Rolland Barthes. I shall utilize Riccardo Picchio's article "The Function of Biblical Thematic Clues in

the Literary Code of 'Slavia Orthodoxa'," where the Italian researcher analyzes the literary techniques used by medieval Orthodox Slavic writers and argues that a significant body of medieval Slavic literature is governed by the dogmas of the Orthodox Church (Picchio 3). As a result, the literary works of that period have both a "spiritual" and a "historical" meaning, and the comprehension of the "spiritual" meaning of their writings, is conducted by means of interpreting the *"biblical thematic clues"* (Picchio 6) that is either of a direct citation from the Scriptures or indirect reference to sacred texts. Once the reader establishes the main thematic clues, as Picchio states, "the entire text acquired for him a new meaning" (6). The application of this theory to my research will allow establishing connections between the literary works separated by centuries through the presence of Biblical allusions in the texts of both periods.

Allusion is a common feature of language and literature, but it is not limited only to works of literature. It represents an indirect reference to some piece of knowledge not actually mentioned. In our case, we are interested primarily in the literary allusions in the texts of post-Soviet writers, particularly allusions to the Scripture and hagiographical texts.

Ziva Ben-Porat presents a thoughtful study of literary allusions in her work titled "The Poetics of Literary Allusions". The Israeli scholar defines literary allusion as "a device for simultaneous activation of two texts." She argues that literary allusion contains a "built-in directional signal" or "marker" that is "identifiable as an element or pattern belonging to another independent text" and

proposes that this marker can be used for activation of independent elements from the evoked text (108). The author deliberately incorporates identifiable elements from other sources, which are to be recognized by competent readers, with prior knowledge of the referent. Literary allusions are closely related to another important strategy of postmodern literature upon which I rely on in my thesis, is that of intertextuality.

According to Allen Graham, the term "intertextuality" was first introduced in the late-1960s by the French linguist, psychoanalyst, and writer Julia Kristeva in her essay, translated as "Word, Dialogue, and Novel," where she first proposes that all texts are formed by the manner in which they transform earlier texts, and that no text is in fact an original product of a single author. Kristeva argues that each text is unavoidably a combination of references and quotations from the previous texts. According to her, the text "is constructed of a mosaic of quotations" and "any text is the absorption and transformation of another" (Kristeva 66).

Mark Lipovetsky in *Russian Postmodernist Fiction: Dialogue with Chaos* points out that intertextuality is widely used as an artistic device in postmodernism and proposes as well to consider the description of the intertextuality offered by the French literary critic, philosopher, and semiotician Roland Barthes. According to Barthes, intertextuality allows the text to exist, and "a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation" (Graham 2). In the essay "Theory of the Text," Barthes contends that "any text is a new tissue of past citations. Bits of code, formulae,

rhythmic models, fragments of social languages, etc., pass into the text and are redistributed within it, for there is always language before and around the text" (39).

I believe that the value of my research lies in the fact that it offers an insight into the phenomenon of literary influences and literary allusions, and it illustrates the ways the traditions of the past have been utilized by in the post-Soviet Russian fiction.

Chapter I

"The meek shall inherit the Earth": Holy foolishness in Tatiana Tolstaia's narrative "Sonia"

The Russian poet Joseph Brodsky has described Tatiana Tolstaia as "the most original, tactile, luminous voice in Russian prose today" (Porter 64). The literary critic Helena Goscilo has called her "the most gifted young woman writing fiction today" ("Dome of Many-Coloured Glass" 280). Born in 1951, and having graduated from the department of Classical Philology of the Leningrad State University in 1974, Tatiana Tolstaia is part of a Russian literary dynasty. She is a granddaughter of the classic novelist Aleksei Nikolaevich Tolstoy and great-grandniece of Leo Tolstoy. Her great-granduncle wrote the epics *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*, while her grandfather is best known for his historical novel *Peter I* (1929–34, tr. *Peter the Great,* 1936). Tolstaia's maternal grandfather was the poet and translator Mikhail Lozinskii, whose most notable achievement is the translation Dante's *The Divine Comedy*.

Tatiana Tolstaia does not write about great events, or about great people. Her main subject is everyday human life with all its joys, fears, desires, and disappointments. Her short stories often concentrate on the private lives of the ordinary people - the middle class of Russia's cities, St. Petersburg in particular. Tolstaia's fiction, in Goscilo's words focuses mostly "on the construction of memorable characters, as is overtly signaled by the titles of stories like "Sonia," "Milaia Shura," "Peters," "Mamochka," and "Fakir" ("Dome of Many-Coloured

Glass" 281). "Tolstaia's fictional universe – [is] a poetic realm ruled by language, to which the mysteries of life, imagination, memory, and death are subject (Goscilo, *The Explosive World,* cover page). The author's translated works include two collections of short stories *On the Golden Porch* (1990) and *Sleepwalker in a Fog* (1992), and a series of essays *Pushkin's Children: Writings on Russia and Russians* (2003).

Helena Goscilo's book, *The Explosive World of Tatiana N. Tolstaia's Fiction*, presents the first full-length study of Tolstaia's works. Goscilo offers a thorough analysis of Tolstaia's stories, setting each in the context of postmodern literary theory. She explores the "colourful paradoxes of Tolstaia's fictional universe" and examines Tolstaia's "interweaving of myth, folklore, songs, children's games, and literary texts into stories displaying astonishing creative power" (*The Explosive World* cover page). The American scholar shows the peculiarities of style and language in some of the stories and demonstrates the crucial role of intertextuality in Tolstaia's fiction.

In this chapter I intend to further the study of Tolstaia's literary works by analyzing hagiographical motifs, themes, and the typological hero in her narrative "Sonia." It is my intention to investigate the connection between the heroine of the short story "Sonia" and the "holy fool" (*iurodivyi)* representatives by comparing Tolstaia's narrative with hagiographical texts.

The materials examined in this chapter are saints' lives, primarily *The Tale of Juliania Osorgina*, *The Life of Blessed Xenia of St. Petersburg*, and Tolstaia's story

"Sonia". The major critical studies concerning holy foolishness that my research will rely on are: Ewa Thompson, *Understanding Russia: The Holy Fool in Russian Culture*; Dmitrii Likhachev and Alexander Panchenko, *Smekhovoj Mir Drevnej Rusi*; George Fedotov, *The Russian Religious Mind*; and Margaret Ziolkowski *Hagiography and Modern Russian Literature*, as well as the articles "Iurodstvo" and "The Subtext Of Christian Asceticism In Aleksander Solzhenitsyn's 'One Day In The Life Of Ivan Denisovich'" by Svitlana Kobets, most of which were discussed in the Introduction.

To illustrate the connection between Tolstaia's "Sonia" and hagiographical writings, I shall explore the motifs of self-sacrifice, suffering, and death in these literary works and will demonstrate that the cultural archetype of holy foolishness has served as an important resource for the development of Tolstaia's protagonist, Sonia. I shall demonstrate in this chapter that Tolstaia's story continues the practice of presenting the holy-fool image in Russian literature even to the extent that its heroine is reminiscent of the traditional holy fool archetype, as identified by scholarship.

Before I start my textual analysis and comparison, I would like to provide short summaries of the examined narratives. *The Tale of Juliania Osorgina* or "Повесть об Ульянии Осоргиной," as it is called in the anthology *Isbornik*, which I shall use as the source for my investigation, was written by her son Kalistratus Osorgin in the period from 1610 to 1620 (Gudzy 376). In this narrative the author affectionately portrays the life of a woman whose piety, spiritual purity, and love for

other people have led to her attaining sainthood without withdrawal from this world into a monastery. The structure, stylistic expressions, and imagery of this narrative are typical of hagiographical texts. They also incorporate a realistic description of the woman's personality and life, which is an example of self-sacrificing love to people and devotion to God. Juiliania's parents die when she is only six years old. At age sixteen she marries the owner of the village(s) Lazarevskoie and Muromskoie and shows herself to be a devoted and loving wife, a good mother, and a caring daughter-in-law. She lives with her husband in love and peace for many years and bears him ten sons and three daughters (many of whom die). People admire her piety, kindness, and simplicity. In addition to her household duties, this woman spends all her free time and nights sewing in order to sell her work. She then gives all that money to indigents and to the Church, and takes care of children and the sick. Although she does not enter a monastery as a nun, Juliania becomes an ascetic in her old age. She ceases intercourse with her husband, sleeps on the stove (placing logs and iron keys under her ribs), walks around in very light clothing during the winter, etc. As is typical for a saint, Juliania predicts her own death and approaches it piously. A couple of years after her death, various miracles occur around her relics.

The hagiographical narrative *The Life of Blessed Xenia of St. Petersburg (Житие Блаженной Ксении Петербургской)* is a story of a young woman who prematurely becomes a widow and loses her mind out of grief. According to her *Life*, she gives all her possessions to the poor, dresses herself in the clothes of her dead husband, and calls herself by his name, Andrei Feodorovich. She takes upon

herself the ascesis of foolishness for Christ's sake and devotes her life to serving God and man. The transitory and earthly life does not hold any value for her. She wears poor clothing, shoes without stockings, and allows her body to suffer during the winter cold. She walks around St. Petersburg enduring humiliation and the laughter from other people. At the same time, she helps them however she can. As recorded in her *Life*, Xenia at night secretly carries heavy bricks for the construction of a new church. Later on, everyone recognizes the holy soul of Xenia, and various miracles occur after her visitations and blessing.

Tolstaia's "Sonia" was written in 1984, and the plot of the narrative is a transformation of a story told to Tolstaia about one of her relatives (Goscilo, *The Explosive World* 185). The events of the story begin in Leningrad (now St. Petersburg) in 1930. The protagonist, Sonia, belongs to a circle of friends who consider her to be an odd person given to her unpredictable, sometimes even tactless behavior in public. Another protagonist of the story who plays an important role in conflict development is Ada Adolfovna "a sharp, thin woman of serpentine elegance" (Tolstaia 146). Once "discomfited by Sonia's idiocy" (146) Ada Adolfovna decides to punish Sonia and works along with her friends, Valerian, Seryozha, and Kotik on a malicious joke, a "plan from Hades" (Tolstaia 149) ("адский план" – "ад" in Russian means "hell"). Ada Adolfovna invents an imaginary persona – "a mysterious admirer for the poor thing," whose name is Nikolai, a married father of three children. "Nikolai" initiates a romantic correspondence with Sonia but suffers terribly since he is not able to meet in person

with the object of his forbidden passion. Ada, on behalf of the nonexistent Nikolai, writes the prose text and "serve[s] as general director" (Tolstaia 150), while Valerian "express[es] himself in poetry" (180). Completely fooled by this trick, Sonia "falls in love instantly" and becomes actively and passionately involved in this romantic epistolary exchange. She devotes herself to her "beloved" Nikolai, and their correspondence continues for years. Then World War II starts and although there is "no time for love, no food, [and] no heat" (Tolstaia 151), Sonia continues to wait for Nikolai and his letters. She stays so devoted to her romantic affection, that even when the situation brings her face to face with her imaginary "Nikolai," the "half-blind from starvation" Sonia fails to recognize him as Ada "laying under mounds of coats with a horrible black face" (153), and she sacrifices herself in order to save her "beloved's" life.

Analyzing the experiences of the heroes in this story, we can perceive a profound philosophical dialogue and a situation in which the ascetic mode of thought and behavior comes to the forefront. In particular, we see the heroine, who bears a striking resemblance in some of the identified features of character and life to the representatives of Russian Christian asceticism - the holy fools.

Various Russian and Western scholars have studied the phenomenon of holy foolishness and its characteristics in Russian culture in order to understand why so many classical and contemporary Russian writers have been attracted by this image and chose to employ its traditional or allegorical form in their works. Margaret Ziolkowski, in *Hagiography and Modern Russian Literature,* suggests that the

essence of Russian holy foolishness is "a feigned madness which both fosters humility in the holy fool and also provides him with a persona which may speak the truth more directly than allowed by normal social conventions" (131). Svitlana Kobets, in her article "*Iurodstvo,*" lists the following traditional attributes of the holy fool: he feigns madness, goes around naked or half-naked (in rags), talks in riddles, gives away whatever is given to him, is socially disruptive, and is, on the other hand, a clairvoyant and a prophet; he performs miracles and in most cases is recognized as a saint upon his or her death (par.5). Ewa Thompson, in *Understanding Russia: The Holy Fool in Russian Culture,* likewise discusses such traits of holy fools as wearing either no clothes or dressing purposely in unusual and ridiculous garments, sometimes in spectacular rags, displaying inappropriate scandalous behavior in public and being demonstrably distinct from other members of society, both secular and religious (2).

In hagiographical writings the holy fool is seen as "one who acts within the dominant theological framework, the main concepts of which are man and God, and the saint's role in bringing man closer to God and salvation" (Murav 25). To sum up, the particular characteristics of holy foolishness, on which the majority of the scholars have agreed include the attitude of mockery towards the world, disrespect to all forms of conventional morality, his desire to attain the virtue of humility, and deliberate behavior conducted "in such a way as to invite taunts and insults, and to become closely identified with the outcasts and rejects of society, and with the humiliated, kenotic Christ" (*The Paterik of the Kievan Caves Monastery* 228).

In the essay "The Poetics of Banality," Svitlana Boym infers the possible connection of Sonia's image to the tradition of Russian holy foolishness and discusses Sonia as "a kind of blessed fool whom everyone considers unattractive, stupid, and always guilty of bad taste" (70). Helena Goscilo also observes that Tolstaia "casts the eponymous protagonist of "Sonia" in a markedly carnivalized mold that, on the surface at least, divests her of recognizable normalcy and the certainty of traditional heroinism" (*The Explosive World* 42). Goscilo does not, however, connect this image with a holy fool paradigm although, in my view, Sonia's mode of behavior, her inner world, and even her appearance invoke the image of this form of sanctity.

Let us start with Sonia's appearance and a manner of dress as presented through the eyes of her friends:

> And how did she dress? Most unbecomingly, friends, most unbecomingly! Something blue, striped, so unflattering. Just imagine: A head like a Przewalski's horse..., under her jaw the huge dangling bow of her blouse sticking out from the stiff lapels of her suit, and the sleeves were always too long. Sunken chest, legs so fat they looked as if they came from a different person's set, and clumsy, pigeon-toed feet. She wore her shoes down on one side.
>
> Well, her chest and legs, that's not clothing...Yes it is, my dear, it counts too. You have to take features like that into account, some things you just can't wear at all...(Tolstaia 146)

From this description Sonia's physical attributes indeed provoke ridicule: she has an unattractive figure and features, she is likened to a horse, and she dresses "unbecomingly." Her legs are "fat," her chest is "sunken," her feet are "clumsy and

pigeon-toed". Tolstaia sarcastically points out her unattractive features, bad taste, and lack of style.

Scholars and hagiographers describe holy fools and other saints as people who usually dressed inappropriately or in rags. At times some wore nothing at all. Jim Forest, in his article "Holy Fools" defines this characteristic of holy fools and other saints as an indication that they have nothing to lose: "there is nothing to cling to and nothing for anyone to steal" (2). Thompson, in her book *Understanding of Russia: The Holy Fool in Russian Culture* discusses the time of Ivan the Terrible, a period when holy fools were famous for their nakedness (2). Then, according to her study, in the nineteenth century, most holy fools abandoned the custom of wearing no clothes at all, and instead put on spectacular rags. She emphasizes the fact that holy fools dressed in unusual and strange garments and that "their way of dressing, while by no means uniform, was distinct enough to make them stand out in a crowd" (2-3).

It is noteworthy that some saints likewise used their dress as an expression of their self-abasement, humility, or voluntary acceptance of suffering – all as part of the kenotic mode they followed. For instance, in *The Tale of Juliania Osorgina*, the Blessed Juliania refuses to wear warm clothing during cold winters, wears boots with bare feet, and puts hazelnut shells and sharp potsherds in her boots in order to mortify her body:

> По зимам она брала у детей деньги себе на одежду, но все раздавала бедным, сама же ходила без теплой одежды и в сапогах на босу ногу. Чтобы подвизаться для Господа и, чувствуя боль, сильнее пламенеть

> молитвою к Богу, Подателю радости и утешения, она под свои босые ноги в сапог подкладывала битые черепки и ореховую скорлупу и так ходила по дому (*Povest'* 546).
>
> In winters she took money from her children for clothing for herself, but [she] gave everything to the poor people, while walking herself without warm clothes and wearing shoes on her bare feet. In order to demonstrate her zeal for the Lord and by means of mortification of the flesh to inflame ever more intensively in prayer to God, the Giver of Joy and Consolation, she put hazelnut shells, and potsherds in her boots and walked around the house.

In "The Life of Blessed Xenia of St. Petersburg," Xenia also dresses herself in the worst clothing and wears torn shoes without stockings on her feet. She intentionally does not dress warmly during winter to force her body to suffer from the severe cold (par.9-11).[3]

It becomes apparent that Sonia's exterior description echoes those in hagiographical writing. In my view, Tolstaia's story uses Sonia's dress to call attention to the significance and beauty of the heroine's spiritual being and to emphasize the spiritual emptiness and ugliness of the story's other characters. Even though this element in Tolstaia's story does not entirely coincide with hagiographers' intention of using dress to express saints' humility and acceptance of suffering, it certainly brings up certain similarities in regards to Sonia.

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[3] Wearing uncouth and raggedy clothing has a long-standing tradition in Old East Slavic Hagiography. Nestor wrote, in the *Life of St. Theodosius*: "his clothing was poor and patched" (*Medieval Russia's Epics* 120), and a new garment the blessed Theodosius "took off and gave it to the needy dressing himself in poor clothing" (*Medieval Russia's Epics* 123). According to Fedotov, Theodosius's "uncouth garb" plays an outstanding part in this *Vita* and "is the occasion of one of the most vivid scenes which pictures his humility" (v.1 116).

The holy fools are often described by critics as "people of lesser intelligence, or…brilliant" (Forest 2). Thompson even regards the well-known Russian folklore image of *Ivan-durak* (Ivan the Fool) as a counterpart to the holy fool of Russian hagiography (127).[4] It is obvious from the first lines of the story that the narrator also tends to highlight the "stupidity" of the main character, though ironically: "one thing is clear – Sonia was an utter fool. No one has ever disputed that quality of hers, and now there is no one to do it anyway" (Tolstaia 145).

Sonia is described as sitting "like a dummy at the end of a long, starched table, in front of a napkin cone folded into a house" during a dinner in 1939 (Tolstaia 145). People consider her manners and behavior odd and even tactless. For instance, in the episode at the dinner table: "I saw you yesterday at the concert with a beautiful lady; I wonder who was she?" Sonia could ask "a bewildered husband" in front of his "stiffened wife". At moments such as this, Lev Adolfovich, brother of Ada Adolfovna, "would purse his lips, arch his eyebrows, and shake his head, his shallow glasses glinting" and say: "If a person is dead, that's for a long time; if he's stupid, that's forever" (Tolstaia 146). In planning their cruel joke Ada Adolfovna and her friends mostly count on that fact: "first of all, Sonia was stupid, that was the point; and secondly, she had a conscience" (Tolstaia 147).

Sonia's behavior and her position in society resemble the way holy fools behaved and were received by those around them. She is obviously a social outcast

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[4] George Fedotov also argues in *The Saints of Old Russia* that "*iurodivyi* is as indispensable to the Russian Church as his secular version: Ivan the Fool, is to the Russian folktale. Doubtlessly, Ivan the Fool reflects the influence of the saintly iurodivyi, just as Ivan the Prince is modeled after the saintly Princes" (qtd Thompson 127).

who defies standards of behavior in society, looking strange or even stupid in the eyes of other people. She is often an object of ridicule and amusement in the company of her friends. Everybody knew, for instance, that Sonia was an excellent cook and could make "delicious dishes from offal, innards – kidneys, udders, and brains" (Tolstaia 147). That was often used as a good excuse for jokes, which everybody else enjoyed:

> Lev Adolfovich would say across the table: "Sonechka, your udders simply astonish me today!" And she would nod happily in reply. And Ada would say in a sweet voice, "I, for one, am enraptured by your sheep's brain." "They're veal," Sonia would reply, not understanding, smiling" (Tolstaia 147).

The participants in the cruel "Nikolai" joke delight in her seeming ignorance. For example, when Sonia and Nikolai agreed in their letters to look together at one star at an appointed time her friends, knowing the content of the letters, try to keep Sonia from looking out the window and call her into the hallway at that very moment:

> Sonia, come here a moment. Sonia, here's what – relishing her confusion: the significant instant was approaching, and Nikolai's gaze was in danger of hanging around in vain in the neighborhood of Sirius or whatever it was called – you generally had to look in the direction of Pulkovo Observatory (Tolstaia 150)

Blessed Xenia is also described in her *vita* as an object of amusement for people who watched her walking in weird garb and calling herself Andrei Feodorovich. We find in *The Life of Blessed Xenia of St. Petersburg* the following episode:

> The street boys, seeing the ragged old woman, began as usual to laugh at and torment her. The Blessed One ordinarily bore all this without murmur. On this occasion, however, the boys did not content themselves with verbal

> abuse, but seeing that she did not take notice of their mocking, they began to throw mud and rocks at her (par. 10).

Thompson emphasizes that holy fools possess a "vague sense of being a stranger" (136). For example, she discusses the behavior of Pierre Bezukhov from Tolstoy's *War and Peace* and the *iurodivyi* Grisha from his *Childhood* as being "stylized" holy fools. Thompson argues that these two characters both challenge the standards of behavior in their society: "Pierre does not know when to begin and end a conversation, how much to invest in it and when to let go of it. The French vicomte speaks to Pierre with irony, and Anna Scherer is quite annoyed by him" (Thompson 136). However, Thompson observes, like holy fools, Pierre does not seem to be disturbed by the discomfort and disorder he causes by his behavior.

Tolstaia's Sonia also feels quite comfortable with her position and does not consider the attitude of her friends towards her as offensive. Moreover, she even tries to be useful to them, helping whenever they need it. She is "irreplaceable" in the kitchen for pre-party preparations, she sews for other people and is always willing "to take people's children for walks and even baby-sit if the whole noisy group was heading for some unpostponable festivity" (Tolstaia 146).

This attitude of non-resistance, forgiveness, and generosity to others is very similar to the mode of behavior of the characters from the saints' lives. St. Juliania, for example, from childhood tries to help other people, prefers sewing and praying to playing games with her peers, and actively helps with domestic duties (*The Tale* 543). She sews at nights to prepare clothes for poor people and widows, cares for

sick people and children, and makes food and to take to them (*The Tale* 543, 546). The narrative confirms the sanctity of a virtuous secular life spent in service to others. "Ни единаго от просящих не отпусти тща в то бо время без числа нищих бе" [She didn't send away empty-handed a single almseeker, although there were a multitude of them at that time] – writes the author of the narrative (547)

The Blessed Xenia similarly spends time helping other people and gives them all her belongings, including money, clothing, and even her house. At nights, she also secretly carries heavy bricks for the construction of a new church ("The Life of Blessed Xenia" par. 22)

Some scholars have noted another peculiarity of holy fools, namely their "unusual or undefined origin" (Thompson 136). This applies to the image of Sonia as well. Similar to other holy fools distinguished by Russian society, when Sonia appears at dinner in the "yellow-smoke-shrouded year of 1930," she is more or less a stranger, who comes from an unknown place. Nobody seems to know "who her parents were, what she was like as a child, where she lived, what she did, and who her friends were up to the day when she came into the world" (Tolstaia. 148). This depiction of Sonia is reminiscent to Leo Tolstoy's description of the *iurodivyi* Grisha in *Childhood*: "Whence he had come, or who were his parents, or what had induced him to choose the strange life which he led, no one ever knew" (40). Similarly, in the *Life of Blessed Xenia*, we do not know anything about Xenia's origin or parents, as the story starts from the moment she is married and then becomes a widow.

As Tolstaia's story progresses, new qualities of Sonia's personality are revealed, and the imperfections in her appearance and mode of behavior fade away due to the beauty of her kind and loving soul, her high morality, compassion, and selflessness. Herein the author brings into focus another important motif that originated in Old Russian spiritual literature: the motif of self-sacrifice and voluntary acceptance of death. The narrative portrays Sonia's capacity for self-sacrificing love and actions through the description of the episode during the Second World War.

During the cruel siege of Leningrad, when people were dying from starvation and cold, "she braves bombardment to seek out her dying love "Nikolai," and in saving his life loses her own" (Goscilo "The Dome of Many-colored Glass" 281). Having received no letters from "Nikolai" for a long time, Sonia, "half-blind from starvation," takes her last can of tomato juice from prewar times, and walks in a cold December day across the city, twisted by the constant bombing, to spoon-feed her 'beloved', in whom she couldn't even recognize Ada Adolfovna, who was "laying under the mounds of coats with a horrible black face" (Tolstaia 152). We read in the story:

> A loving heart – say what you will – feels such things, you can't trick it. And realizing that it was time, ready to turn to ashes in order to save her one and only, Sonia took everything she had – a can of prewar tomato juice, saved for a matter of life and death like this and made her way across all Leningrad to the dying Nikolai's apartment. There was exactly enough juice for one life…(152)
> Then she spoon-fed him some juice, threw a few books onto the fire, blessed her lucky fate, and left with a pail to get some water, never to return." (153)

The motif of self-sacrificial action performed in order to save someone's life, and the offering up of the last thing she has, brings Sonia's image close to the characters from the lives of the saints and from Biblical stories, the main foundation of the saints' lives. The can of tomato juice can be metaphorically compared to the cup of wine that is introduced in the New Testament story of the Last Supper of Jesus Christ with his disciples. In the Gospel of Mathew, Jesus instructs his disciples to drink the wine accepting it as his blood, the blood that would be shed for their salvation and for that of all humanity. The disciples were the foundation of the Church, which Jesus loved and he gave his blood for them as a ransom for their salvation.

> And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." (Matthew 26:27, 28)

It is likely that Tolstaia uses this reference to Holy Scripture, skillfully shaping it into a congruent piece of narrative material. Biblical allusions, though indirect, constitute an essential part of her story's poetics.

The motif of self-sacrifice employed by Tolstaia is a traditional element in many hagiographical works, including the narrative about Juliania. One episode of the *Tale of Saint Juliania* describes a time of great starvation during the reign of Boris Godunov (1601-1603) when people even resorted to consuming human flesh. The holy woman, forgetting about herself, gives the last she has to other people in order to save their lives: she sells all her cattle and personal belongings, gives food to

others and helps the sick, while remaining hungry herself. Here is a short, illustrative passage from the narrative:

> Окрестные помещики с упреком говорили нищим зачем вы заходите к ней Чего взять с нее Она и сама помирает с голоду А мы вот что скажем говорили нищие много обошли мы сел где нам подавали настоящий хлеб да и он не елся нам так всласть как хлеб этой вдовы (Izbornik 547).
>
> The local landowners reproached the almseekers saying, "Why do you approach her? What can you get from her? She herself starving to death,"- said the almseekers - "we have visited many villages, where they gave us real bread, but it was not eaten with such satisfaction as the bread of this widow"

Tolstaia's description of the siege of Leningrad during the Second World War is reminiscent of the description of starvation in the hagiographical narrative:

> No time for love. She ate everything she could find, boiled her leather shoes, drank hot bouillon made from wallpaper – that had a little paste, at least. December came, everything ended (Tolstaia 152).

Vladimir Kuskov, in his book *A History of Old Russian Literature*, states that "Juliania helps the starving, cares for the sick in time of plague and gives so much to charity that she is left without a single silver coin" (279). We find in the text on Juliania's life:

> И паче мирская отверже печашеся о душе как угодити богу ревнуя прежним святым женам моляся богу ревнуя и постяся и милостыню безмерну творя яко многажды не остати у нея ни одной сребреницы и займая даяше нищим милостыню (545)
>
> And moreover she rejected wordly things, carrying more for her soul and pleasing God emulating the women of old, praying to God, fasting, performing works of mercy without measure to the extent that many times there remained not a single silver coin [in her purse] and borrowing [the money], she gave alms to the poor.

It should be noted here that this episode in *The Life* alludes respectively to the New Testament story of the Widow's mite:

> And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing. And he called unto him his disciples, and saith unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury: For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she did cast in all that she had, even all her living (Mark 12:42-44).

The presence of Biblical allusions in medieval Slavic literature has been previously researched by the Italian academic Riccardo Picchio in his work *The Function of Biblical Thematic Clues in the Literary Code of "Slavia Orthodoxa,"* as I have briefly mentioned in the Introduction. In his research, Picchio explores some literary techniques used by medieval Orthodox Slavic writers and comes to the conclusion that a significant portion of medieval literature of the Eastern and Southern Slavs was governed by common principles dependent on the dogmatic teaching of the Orthodox Church. Furthermore, because of Biblical inspiration, many of these literary works have both a "spiritual" and a "historical" meaning (Picchio 5). Picchio claims that in order to understand the "higher," that is, the "spiritual" meaning of their writings, medieval Orthodox Slavic writers had recourse to structurally marked thematic clues which were intended to bridge the semantic gap between the senses.

The *"thematic clue"* as a device may consist either of a direct citation from the Scriptures or it may be an indirect reference to sacred texts. For instance, in the narrative about Juliania, "Дщи моя, мужайся и крепися, и не бойся бесовского

прещения, Христос бо мне повеле тебе соблюдати от бесов и злых человек!" [My daughter, take courage and strength. Don't be afraid of demons' temptations; because Christ has ordered me to protect you from the demons and evil people.] (*The Tale* 544). Picchio defines the usual position of *biblical thematic clues* as being at the beginning of the *expositio*, that is either in the first lines of a text or immediately after the introductory section (6). A theme announced in the beginning was considered to serve as a key to understanding the main idea of the work.

Though Picchio's methodology is prescribed for Slavic literature written during the Middle Ages, Tolstaia's narrative has been shown to employs Biblical allusions as well. Likewise the protagonists of hagiographical writings, Sonia bases her life on the Biblical principles of humanity and generosity in the face of great adversity and gives away the very last of her possessions to help others.

The story "Sonia" exhibits the influence of the hagiographical traditions also in its structure and poetics. As Kuskov contends in his study, the majority of medieval works are structured around "the opposition of material to ideal, temporal to eternal, flesh to spirit, evil to good [...], ideal characters to villains" (19-20) that have determined the nature of the artistic method of Old Russian literature and its main principle symbolism (19). The world depicted in hagiographical writings is rigidly divided into the material and spiritual, reflecting the binary consciousness of medieval man. The authors of saints' lives emphasized the opposition of soul and body, sin and virtue, life and death, eternity and temporality in their works.

Svitlana Boym, in her essay "The Poetics of Banality," observes in Tolstaia's story "the clear-cut opposition between *byt* and *bytie*," that is the opposition of everyday existence and spiritual being, according to traditional interpretations in Russian spirituality (60).

Tolstaia's Sonia is opposed to another heroine of the story, Ada Adolfovna. This opposition is underlined first of all through the symbolic meaning of their names. Ada Adolfovna's name, in Helena Goscilo's view, evokes a double hell ("ad" means hell in Russian), and the comparisons of her to a snake ("по змеиному элегантна" [elegant as a snake], "этой змее Аде Адольфовне," [this snake Ada Adolfovna] (139, 141), the stress on her physical traits and on the cruelty of her jokes ("Let's call it "a plan from Ades"), all indicate Ada's symbolic function as a representative of egoistical, crude, and material reality and of malice.

Sonia is a diminutive form from the name Sophia, which by contrast means "Divine Wisdom" or the Wisdom of Deity in Greek. According to *The Passion of the Holy Martyrs Faith, Hope, and Love and their Mother Sophia*, Sophia was the name of an early Orthodox saint who died of grief after her three daughters were cruelly martyred for their Christian faith.[5]

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[5] See *The Passion of the Holy Martyrs Faith, Hope, and Love and their Mother Sophia* [URL source]. Available at http://www.st-sophia.com/ From The Great Collection of the Lives of the Saints, Volume 1: September, compiled by St. Demetrius of Rostov. Accessed 8 May 2006.

Therefore, Russian iconography usually portrays Sophia together with her three daughters, Faith, Love, and Hope, the very qualities that Tolstaia's heroine is imbued with.

Goscilo remarks that "it would be difficult to find a feminine name in Russian more redolent of spiritual qualities than Sonia," and the critic believes that this name "personifies the symbolic framework for primacy of inner qualities over physical incongruities, the world of self-sacrifice and love to other people" (*The Explosive World 185*). No wonder, this name has been frequently used with intended meaning by a number of Russian writers: Dostoyevsky's Sonia Marmeladova in *Crime and Punishment*, Tolstoy's Sonia in *War and Peace*, and Jurii Trifonov's Sonia in *House on the Embankment,* to name but a few.

Sonia's personality in Tolstaia's story corresponds entirely to the meaning of her name. Her inner world is of much greater importance than her physical appearance, and though it may seem externally hideous, she is certainly spiritually superior to any other participant in the story.

The contrast between the two heroines is expressed not only through the symbolic meaning of their names. Their appearances are opposed as well: Ada Adolfovna, is said to possess "a serpentine elegance," a "marvelous figure, dusky face with dark rose cheeks" (Tolstaia 149), whereas Sonia, as we recall, is dressed "unbecomingly" and has a "sunken chest, legs so fat they looked as if they came from a different person's set, [and] enormous feet" (Tolstaia 147).

The brooches the women wear are another significant detail illustrating their opposing natures. Ada Adolfovna and her actions perfectly correspond with her ornament: "[a] large cameo…pinned near her throat, someone is killing something on it: shields, spears, the enemy gracefully fallen." We can perceive the author's sarcasm in these words: "the enemy gracefully fallen". By contrast, we can see Sonia's "sole adornment," her enamel dove, which she never took off of her "ugly jacket," except to give it to her only "beloved,'' along with the promise to give her life for him or "follow him, if necessary, to the end of the earth" (148).

> She had a broach, an enamel dove. She wore it on the lapel of her jacket, never parted with it. And when she changed into another dress, she always pinned on that dove. (147)
> She sent wagon loads of dried flowers in envelopes, and for one of Nikolai's birthdays she sent him her only ornament, taking it off her ugly jacket: the white enamel dove. "Sonia, where is your dove?" "It flew off," she said, revealing her ivory equine teeth. (151)

Sonia's enamel dove broach also has a symbolic meaning that likens her to images of holy persons. According to Slavic belief, at death the soul turns into a dove and in Christian art the dove is visually equated with the religious concept of the Holy Ghost. Svitlana Boym suggests that Sonia's little brooch can be regarded as a symbol of spirituality (Goscilo, *Fruit of Her Plum* 72). The *Slavic Myths Gallery* indicates that the dove "is commonly associated with kindness, purity of feeling or faith and humility" (slide 67). As discussed above, these qualities constitute essential aspects of the kenotic mode of being as practiced by holy fools.

The actions of these heroines are also juxtaposed. Tolstaia, for example, clearly stresses the contrast in Ada's and Sonia's motives for correspondence: "two

women in two parts of Leningrad, one in hate, the other in love, wrote letters to each other about a person who had never existed" (154). Hence, the two protagonists, Sonia and Ada Adolfovna, antithetical opposites, provoke reflection in the mind of the reader on the value of physical and spiritual beauty, as well as the meaning of life and death.

Tolstaia's interpretation of the meaning of life and death in the story "Sonia" reflects her personal belief that the significance of a life becomes partially revealed only after the person's death. From interviews with the writer it is known that Tatiana Tolstaia "treats the experience of death as a potential epiphany, enabling those who dismissed a given individual during her or his life to gain insight into that life and learn to appreciate it, thereby attaining a deeper sense of life in general" (Goscilo, "Dome of Many-Coloured" Glass 289).

In the *Literaturnaia gazeta [Literary Gazette]* interview of 1986, Tolstaia commented:

> Пока жизнь не завершена, ее нельзя ни подытожить, ни оценить. Меня интересует жизнь целиком, и то что человек никому не нужен при жизни, после своей смерти он становится все нужней и память о нем растет как тень на закате (qtd Goscilo, "Dome of Many-Coloured Glass" 281).
>
> Until life is over, you can neither summarize nor evaluate it. I am interested in life in its entirety, and the fact that a person is not of interest for anybody during his/her life, after the death he/she becomes more and more necessary and the memory of this person grows, like a shadow at the time of dusk.

Tolstaia'a personal view is reflected in her narrative, and it is also associated with another important theme of Old Slavic hagiography that is the theme of

immortality and life after death. In hagiography, the idea of life after death and the various miracles that occur in connection with a saint's body and relics is a very common textual element. The body of the saint usually remains unchanged for years, churches or monasteries are erected and named after the saint, their name days are celebrated according to the Church calendar, etc. In the hagiographical writings about Juliania and Xenia, various miracles occur with the body of the woman, discovered 10 years after her death. In the *Tale of Juliania* we read:

> И мнози слышаху и прихождаху и мазаху ся миром тем и облегчение от различных недуг приимаху. Егда же мире то раздано бысть нача подле гроба исходити персть аки песком теми облегчение приемлюти до сего дня.
>
> And many heard [of this] and they came and anointed themselves with this myrrh and obtained relief from many ailments [from it]. And when their myrrh was exhausted dust like sand began to appear next to her coffin and [people] obtained relief to the present day.

According to Trofimov's study *Sviatye Zheny Rusi*, St. Juliania was canonized in 1604 (125). Her relics are still kept in the Cathedral of the Holy Virgin, a former monastery of the city of Murom (Trofimov 128).

Tolstaia's story, similarly to saints' lives, expresses the idea that the physical death of the person does not mean the end of his/her spiritual life. Sonia dies but not the memory of her; her spirit lives and continues to teach other generations. The beginning of the narrative reflects this motif:

> A person lived – a person died. Only the name remains – Sonia. Remember Sonia used to say…A dress like Sonia's…You keep blowing your nose all the time, like Sonia…Then even the people who used to say that died, and there was only a trace of her voice in my head, incorporeal, seeming to come from the black jaws of the telephone receiver. (145)

This paragraph, as Boym argues, "reveals what the story is about: about the death and revival by fiction – what is poetically called *нарядное бессмертие* [festively adorned immortality]" ("The Poetics of Banality" 70). "Sonia" ends with the phrase "After all, doves don't burn," which can also be regarded as a poetic expression of the immortality of Sonia's soul, warm memories of her, and the victory of spirituality over the crude reality of every day life.

Tolstaia's poetics are what distinguishes her from other writers, the representatives of postmodernist literary trend (Sorokin, Viktor Erofeev, Evgeni Popov, Liudmila Petrushevskaia). As Goscilo points out, Tolstaia's prose is "a luxurious, sonorous prose saturated with expressive metaphors and metonyms that enable radical condensation – a prose rich in rhetorical devices, intertexts, echoes from folklore, and erratic shifts in mood, tone, perspective, and diction that is marked by irregular rhythm and intense poetic energy"(*Subversive Imagination* 168). The story "Sonia" is a perfect example of this distinction in the writer's style, abounding with allusions, intertexts, symbolic images, and rhetorical devices.

Symbolism is discussed as the leading principle of the Old Russian literature as well. It has been noted and analyzed by many experts of Russian literature, such as V. Adrianova-Peretts (1947), D. S. Likhachev (1967), N. Gudzy (1970), and V. Kuskov (1980). The symbolism of this period is described as "closely bound with the symbolism of folk poetry" (Kuskov 19). The word in Old Slavic literary works is polysemantic, and "it can be interpreted literary or figuratively, [that] determines the nature of symbolic metaphors and similes in Old Russian literature" (Kuskov 19).

Therefore, besides postmodern intertextuality (with its references, allusions, citations, paraphrases, and implications), Tolstaia's symbolism and the folklore imagery have established another linkage in her story to the earlier hagiographical writings.

In this chapter, I have examined the hagiographical and Biblical motifs, the imagery, and poetics in Tatiana Tolstaia's postmodern narrative. The comparative analysis of the story "Sonia" with the hagiographical texts of Old Russian literature, primarily, the *Tale of Juliania Osorgina* and *The Life of Blessed Xenia of St. Petersburg*, has demonstrated that the motifs, imagery, and artistic means employed by Tolstaia reflects the traditions of Old East Slavic hagiographical writing. Firstly, Tolstaia's story "Sonia," acquires kenotic meaning through the religious themes and allusions in the narrative; secondly, through the descriptions of the main character's ascetic mode of being which resembles a representative of the holy fool paradigm; and finally, there are some convergences at the level of poetics, such as Biblical allusions, symbolism, and structuring the narrative around the opposition of good and evil, *byt* and *bytie*. The images of Biblical characters and their saintly protagonists have evidently served as a rich source of inspiration for characters depicted in the stories of both contemporary and Old Russian writers. Tolstaia's "Sonia" shares significant elements with the medieval saints' lives. Tolstaia's protagonist continues the tradition of the holy-fool image in Russian literature, even though she doesn't overtly express her religious beliefs. My next chapter will focus

on hagiographical traditions in the works of another prominent postmodern writer – Liudmila Petrushevskaia.

Chapter II

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son": Suffering and Self-sacrifice in Liudmila Petrushevskaia's "Our Crowd".

The main purpose of this chapter is to further demonstrate that the traditions of hagiography and Bible recur and find further transformation in the literary works of post-Soviet Russian writers. The previous section was devoted to an analysis of hagiographical topoi in Tatiana Tolstaia's short narrative "Sonia". In the present chapter, I intend to investigate the hagiographical and scriptural themes, motifs, and imagery in the prose of another leading post-Soviet writer Liudmila Petrushevskaia.

Liudmila Petrushevskaia (1938-) has often been called "one of the most controversial prose writers and dramatists in Russia" (Woll 125), because she "ignores existing artistic canons while broaching new subjects and issues" (McLaughlin 98). At the same time, she stands "supreme by virtue of her stylistic sophistication and her formidable originality as a prosaist" (Goscilo, "Contemporary Women's Fiction" 219), and her writings are described to "combine postmodernist trends with the psychological insights and parodic touches found in the works of Gogol, Dostoevsky, Saltykov-Shchedrin, Chekhov, and Bulgakov (Smith par.1)". The Toefer Foundation in Germany has awarded Liudmila Petrushevskaia the prestigious Pushkin Prize, and her stories and plays are now published in more than 20 countries.

Dalton-Brown in her book *Voices from the Void* claims that at a superficial glance Petrushevskaia can be considered a representative of the literary trend labeled

"chernukha," which means "dwelling on the dark side of humanity" (11), and whose works portray violence, alcoholism, prostitution, disease, rape, abortion, and death - the physical side of human life. I would argue, however, that through that naturalistic depiction of the dark sides of Russian *byt* [existence], Petrushevskaia strives to make her readers aware of existing problems in everyday life and raises the importance of the present day spiritual renaissance. "Her purpose is to shock people into catharsis. She wants to make them think for themselves and search for alternatives," writes McLaughlin (98). This critic also suggests that Petrushevskaia's portrayal of the morally ugly masks her "deep longing for the realization of an ideal [and that] she writes in 'order to liberate [herself] from grief'" (McLaughlin 98).

In her interview for *Literaturnaia gazeta* [Literary Gazette] Petrushevskaia confesses: "Perhaps there is a grain of salvation in what I have written. Why do people tell things to each other? In order to maintain the notion of an ideal, something worth striving for, a sense of how it should be" (qtd McLaughlin 98).

In this chapter, I shall look at the traditional hagiographical motifs of suffering, self-sacrifice, and death in Petrushevskaia's "Our Crowd" and analyze their significance in the meaning of her narrative. I shall also demonstrate that some of the characteristics of the story's protagonist are similar to the ones exemplified by the holy fools reflected in hagiographical narratives. My analysis hence will employ the texts from the Old East Slavic hagiography, namely "The Martyrdom of Boris and Gleb," *The Life of Blessed Xenia of St. Petersburg* as well as Petrushevskaia's "Our Crowd".

The story "Our Crowd" is one of Petrushevskaia's "most shocking narratives," which "generated a good deal of reaction in intellectual circles (Porter 55). The story dates from 1979, but was first published in *Novyi mir [New World]* in January 1988. As Goscilo states in "Paradigm Lost? Contemporary Women's Fiction," it is also Petrushevskaia's longest and her best narrative, offering a vivid, multifaceted illustration of how the moral underpinnings of contemporary Russian society have eroded (220). Indeed, along with many of Petrushevskaia's stories and plays, "Our Crowd" deals with the private problems of people and their inter-relationships. The story portrays critical life events of various characters, all of who are representatives of Moscow's technical intelligentsia of the Brezhnev period.

Petrushevskaia builds the narrative in a form of monologues, through which the anonymous female narrator reveals truths about the members of her circle of "friends". The narrator does not identify herself nor do the other characters of the story refer to her by name. It seems that Petrushevskaia deliberately leaves the narrator anonymous to her reader. In this, Petrushevskaia is similar to the composer-narrator of hagiographical works, the majority of who are also anonymous (Kuskov 12).

While the heroine of "Our Crowd" is without a name, the other members of her "circle" have names, which are either diminutives (Marisha, Lenka, Levka, Alesha) or nicknames (Andrei Stoolpigeon, Tania the Valkyrie). Robert Porter, in *Russia's Alternative Prose*, indicates that the diminutive in Russian, besides suggesting familiarity or affection, can also be a sign of contempt and disapproval,

and that in "Our Crowd" "the relationship between the heroine and her acquaintances is unyielding in its ambivalence" (56).

Revelations made about the main character and her friends are not presented in a sequential fashion. There is a very rapid transition from one "mini-narrative" to another, in which the narrator discusses each member of this circle of friends, children, lovers, ex-husbands, and ex-wives. She exposes "the complete collapse of the moral foundations of her circle" (Peterson 161). She talks openly about alcoholism, infidelity, divorce, child abuse, sickness, and death. Josephine Woll, in her 1993 article titled "The Minotaur in the Maze: Remarks on Liudmila Petrushevskaia," suggests that Petrushevskaia radically undercuts Russian culture's axiomatic perception of the intelligentsia as the standard-bearers of integrity and morality through her "judgmental, unreliable narrator" (125).

The narrator of "Our Crowd" is also a protagonist in the story, and all the events are concentrated around her image. The critical circumstances of her life have become the main focus of the author's attention and provided a basis for the plot of the narrative, which is not easy to identify, since the story "Our Crowd" is written in a "stream of consciousness" narrative technique, as James Halliday states in his work (42).

To facilitate the reader's understanding of my analysis, I shall outline the basic events of the story. The protagonist's husband Kolia leaves her for another woman, Marisha, who is a close friend of their family. Both of the protagonist's parents are dead, and she herself realizes that she has developed the same illness that

killed her mother. This disease will lead to her blindness and eventual death. Although the doctor does not reveal the diagnosis directly, he prescribes the same medicine her mother had taken and arranges for the narrator to take identical tests. The protagonist's suspicion of what might await her, leads her to formulate some sort of plan of arrangements for the future for her son Alesha.

The narrator invites all her friends (the crowd), including her ex-husband with his new wife to an Easter celebration. It was customary in their circle to celebrate this holiday at their place. On these occasions, they usually send the protagonist and Kolia's son Alesha to her parents' dacha. Despite the fact that both of the protagonist's parents are now dead, she still instructs Alesha to go to the dacha alone and by no means to come back and ring the doorbell. She is quite confident that Alesha will obey her instructions, as he has been taught to always do as he is told. Kolia and Marisha, whose marriage had just taken place the day before, are invited as well. At the party the narrator declares that it has been arranged that Alesha will be sent to an orphanage, and asks Marisha if she wants to live with Kolia (the narrator's ex-husband) in her apartment. The story culminates when Kolia opens the door to let everyone out and sees that Alesha is asleep on the steps. At that moment, the narrator grabs Alesha, yells at him, and hits him. She carries on hitting her son in the face so hard that "blood started flowing from child's nose," and he begins to choke. The others pull her off the boy with expressions of disgust and uttering condemnations; they leave taking Alesha along with them.

As we have observed, the protagonist in "Our Crowd" is the central and most complex image in the story, and is associated with a number of themes and motifs, to which the author wants to draw the readers' attention. My analysis first of all will focus on the interpretation of the themes of self-sacrifice and voluntary acceptance of suffering in "Our Crowd" as those motifs are also of primary importance in Old East Slavic hagiography.

Why does the theme of suffering appear to be so important in a number of Petrushevskaia's works and in the story "Our Crowd" in particular? In my view, the answers to these questions can be derived from both the personal life experiences of the writer and the traditional meaning of suffering and self-sacrifice in Russian spirituality.

Suffering was an abiding part of Petrushevskaia's life, and it has often become the main subject of her literary works. She was born in Moscow in 1938, at the time of the terror and repression. According to Sally Dalton Brown's study, Petrushevskaia's father deserted their family before she was even born, leaving her mother to raise her during the war. Due to the difficult economic situation of the 1940s, Petrushevskaia's mother had to place her nine-year old daughter in an orphanage for a year, so that she could at least be fed. Speaking about her childhood, Petrushevskaia states: "By the time I was 10, I felt I'd been through all the circles of hell" (Sally Laird 29). Her family, including her grandparents, struggled to survive in a single 12-metre square room, where the child never had any living space that she could call her own. As the writer once stated herself, outside their one-room

residence, she had a choice between a life in the library and a life on the streets; Petrushevskaia most often chose the life in the library (Laird 33).

The major events in the writer's adult life, as outlined by Dalton-Brown, include her studies at Moscow University, her first marriage, the birth of her first child, widowhood (her husband suffered from an illness which resulted in paralysis, and later in his death), her second marriage, the birth of two more children, and various jobs as a radio presenter, a journalist, an editor, a teacher, and a translator (2). Her writing career started in 1968 and, according to her, occurred only after experiencing motherhood and attaining the maturity to write:

> I started writing properly only when I discovered about suffering-not only suffering on my own account, but a fear for a beloved being. Until that moment, until the birth of your first child, you know only fear for yourself (in Delton-Brown 2).

Helena Goscilo states that in her depiction of suffering, Petrushevskaia is a "modern reincarnation of ancient Greek tragedians" (Hoisington 104). Deming Brown, in *The Last Years of Soviet Russian Literature,* also argues that Petrushevskaia's texts have always contained scenes from the everyday suffering that her characters experience, and he contends that this is a reason why Petrushevskaia has not been well received by the critics:

> The intensity and frequency of abuse and suffering in her works is so great that she is considered by some to be simply a repulsive distorter of the Russian scene. However, her knowledge of that scene is so intimate and detailed, and her ability to evoke the social and moral atmosphere so impressive, that she has commanded increasingly enthusiastic and respectful attention. She is now a leading contemporary literary figure whose writing embraces much more than the gritty aspects of life, and whose interests are steadily developing. (151)

In addition to the personal circumstances of Petrushevskaia's life, the reference to the theme of suffering in her literary works, are most likely drawn from the meaning of suffering and self-sacrifice in Russian spirituality. I believe that the meaning of suffering in Russian spirituality offers insight into why a number of medieval and contemporary writers have employed those motifs in their works.

Suffering and self-sacrifice are essential components of Christian asceticism. Voluntary acceptance of suffering and self-sacrifice are reflected as Christian values in all hagiographical writings from the medieval period (1000-1700) and later on, the works of Modern Russian literature have revisited the themes innumerable times. Pushkin, Gogol, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Blok, Pasternak, Solzhenitsyn, and many others develop these themes in their writings, introducing heroes who voluntarily accept suffering and sacrifice themselves for the sake of other people or their future well being. Despite the traditional understanding of suffering as tragedy, misfortune, or punishment, in Russian religious consciousness it acquires a rather positive meaning: it is a part of the kenotic mode of being, the main path of Christian asceticism, and the way for purifying the heart and bringing yourself closer to God. As it was already discussed in the previous chapter, the other components of Christian asceticism, according to Kobets, are meekness, voluntary poverty, humility, obedience, and non-resistance to violence and even death.

Inna Naletova, in her article titled "Forgiving or Forgetting? Rethinking the Soviet Past: an Orthodox Christian Perspective" states that suffering, in the Orthodox view, "directs one toward a reunion with God and a restoration of one's faith," and it

is understood as "a Christian response to the broken moral order, a mark representing the guilt of generations, a consequence of human sin and imperfection" (14). She states that "suffering" in the Russian Orthodox mind is a way to be Christian in a hostile environment, and "passion-bearing" is considered to be a part of the ideal in the Russian understanding of sainthood (Naletova 6).

The well-known story of the death of Boris and Gleb, two sons of Prince Vladimir, is viewed as a traditional model of Christian conduct, and it reflects the significance of the cult of "holy sufferers" in Russian spirituality. It is recorded in "The Martyrdom of Boris and Gleb" ("Сказание о Борисе и Глебе"), which is one of the oldest hagiographical documents of Kievan Rus. This work itself is not the story of a saint's life, but it combines factual and hagiographical elements within the bounds of one narrative. Let me summarize the plot of this narrative.

After the death of Prince Vladimir in 1015, his adopted son Sviatopolk, fearing to be dethroned sends his emissaries to assassinate his two younger brothers, Boris and Gleb who, according to the narrative, were preferred by the people due to their Christian virtues. Hearing of this plot against them, the young princes both refuse to raise a hand against Sviatopolk. "Be it not for me to raise my hand against my elder brother. Now that my father has passed away, let him take the place of my father in my heart." (*The Martyrdom of Boris and Gleb* 101), Boris said to his troops who were inclining them to march on Kiev. Instead of resisting, they disbanded their army and prepared for death. Prince Boris is reading the Psalms and praying when his brother's emissaries arrive:

> Lord Jesus Christ, who in this image hast appeared on earth for our salvation, and who, having voluntary suffered thy hands to be nailed to the cross, didst endure thy passion for our sins, so help me now to endure my passion. For I accept it not from those who are my enemies, but from the hands of my own brother. Hold it not against him as a sin, O Lord! (102).

Then he lays himself down peacefully and lets the assassins run him through with their spears. Similarly, Prince Gleb after the death of his brother says: "If thou hast received affliction from God, pray for me that I may endure the same passion. For it were better for me to dwell with thee than in this deceitful world" (103). He is found by the murders in a boat in the middle of the river. Boris and Gleb voluntarily choose death instead of war and resistance against their older half-brother. They refused to fight because they are opposed to war with their brother on principle. They are opposed to raising their hands against their elder brother, a sort of surrogate father, and they die therefore obeying the Commandment, which says, "Honor thy father and thy mother". After their death, Boris and Gleb were proclaimed the first Russian saints.

As Naletova perspicaciously observes, these two Russian saints "did not defend Christianity, but rather imitated Christ by showing their very personal understandings of their relationships with Him" (13). Among the Princes' virtues, people principally glorified their "suffering," and Boris and Gleb were often called "старотерпцы" [passion-bearers] or 'saints-who-innocently-suffered-the-Passion.' "Innocent suffering," thereafter, has become one of the most important attributes of the Russian saint. Svitlana Kobets argues that "the holy sufferers" as a class of

saints, are found only in Russia, where they have replaced to a considerable degree, martyrs for the faith in the popular cults (14).

The nineteenth-century Russian writer, Feodor Dostoevsky had also perceived, "in the cult of voluntarily suffering, evidence of 'martyr consciousness' in Russian people." He wrote in his diary:

> The Russian people know Christ, their God...though they did not study at school. They know him because for many centuries they have borne many sufferings...Russian peasants called his whole land his whole community, all Russia, "Christianity" and the peasantry, that is to say the "cross bearing people." (qtd in Naletova 13)

Patriarch Alexis has expressed a similar understanding of suffering: "Under torture we learnt to pray for the hangmen," he said with regards to Soviet persecution of the Church in his 1990 interview for *Literaturnaia Gazeta* [Literary Gazette 8]. Undoubtedly, suffering has always arisen as a dominant theme in Russian literature and culture, from the oldest time until the present day, and I believe that Petrushevskaia' narrative reflects this tradition as well.

The themes addressed in "Our Crowd" have been the main reason why the story, which was written in 1979, was first published in *Novyi Mir* [New World] only in January 1988. "Our Crowd" along with many other Petrushevskaia's works, was banned until Gorbachev's *glasnost* (openness) in late 1980s, the official end of censorship and the proclamation of freedom of the press in 1990. Nadia Peterson in "The Voice of the Crowd: Liudmila Petrushevskaia" states that the reasons for the virtual ban on Petrushevskaia's prose have been "the subversive nature of its content and the innovations in its form, and the author's subversion lies, first of all, in

questioning the principles of Soviet morality" (159).

The dark description of daily Soviet life, emphasizing the miseries of people found in Petrushevskaia' stories clashed with the ideas propagated at that time by the state. Her portrayal of suffering, pain, illness, death, violence, deception, and the loss of moral values, the main focus of "Our Crowd," did not fit into the "optimistic art" of Socialist Realism literature. It was only in the late 1980s that Petrushevskaia could truly express herself, and her works (fiction and drama) started appearing in print or in stage production. Taboo topics have become the focus of the literary works of many post-Soviet Russian writers, and the themes of suffering and sacrifice have been re-addressed in the context of their traditional spiritual meaning. Petrushevskaia's "Our Crowd" continues the exploitation and transformation of these traditional themes of hagiography and scriptural writings in the realm of contemporary Russian fiction.

In order to investigate Petrushevskaia's use and interpretation of those themes in "Our Crowd," I shall analyze the image of the protagonist-narrator in the story. In the beginning of the story, she declares about herself: "I am very smart" that seems, at first, to be far from the truth. Besides that, this statement directly represents the reversal of the hagiographical *topos* of extreme modesty as a prominent characteristic of the saint, as stressed in medieval Russian writings.

The protagonist characterizes herself as "a hard, harsh person, always with a smile on my fully rosy lips and always with a smirk at everyone" (Petrushevskaia 3). That doesn't sound like a very attractive characteristic either. We perceive an irony

in her words that provides a clue that there is another hidden meaning of the text. We cannot understand at first, why she decides to introduce the circle of her friends and to reveal all the unattractive, at times even ugly sides of their lives. We don't know the source of her boundless anger yet, but we notice that her tone is often sarcastic, gossipy, and even ignorant when she talks about them. Her sarcastic smile is repeatedly emphasized in the story.

From the first pages, one can observe that her relationship to the circle is quite problematic: from one side, she belongs to it, but on the other hand, she is opposed to it. Nadia Peterson, in her book *Subversive Imaginations: Fantastic Prose and the End of Soviet Literature, 1970-1990s*, states in this regard, "She belongs to it, but, paradoxically, as an outsider or, rather as a person speaking from the underground" (161). The critic defines the protagonist's role as that of "an interrogator, a revealer of hidden truths and an accuser" in the relation to her circle of friends (160), which is true, in my opinion. I would further argue that her role in this story is reminiscent of the role of a holy fool represented in Old Russian hagiography and Russian literature of various times.

Similar to holy fools, the protagonist's mode of addressing and communication sets her apart from other people. The holy fool usually passes judgment on a society of which he or she is nevertheless a member, an insider. Our heroine is a part of her circle as well, and "she is perfectly capable of manipulating it, as she is fluent in the language of her circle" (Peterson 162).

Dmitrii Likhachev and Alexandr Panchenko, in their book *Smehovoi Mir*

Drevnei Rusi [*The World of Laughter of Ancient Rus'*], declare that the essence of holy foolishness lies as the kernel in any critical protest to society's vices.

> Активная сторона юродства заключается в обязанности ругаться миру т.е. жить в миру, среди людей обличая пороки и грехи сильных и слабых и не обращая внимания на общественные приличия (101).
>
> The active part of holy foolishness lays in responsibility to criticize the world, to live in the world among the people denouncing vises and sins of the strongest and the weakest without paying any attention to the societal norms of behavior.,

Indeed, no holy fool can communicate with his/her world successfully. Just as Dostoyesvsky's Prince Myshkin's innocence, fearlessness, humility, and lack of self-interest sets him apart from other people, and Sonya's naivety, sincerity, and humanity opposes her to her surroundings, in Petrushevskaia's story, the protagonist's straightforwardness, perspicacity, and assertiveness puts her in opposition to her circle, which eventually dislikes and rejects her.

As the story progresses, the protagonist's situation becomes clear, so too do the reasons for revealing the truth about her circle: they are those people whom she, paradoxically, has decided to entrust her son and his future to, and that is the reason she introduces them. That can only be the indication that is no escape from this circle of hell, in the protagonist's opinion. The critical circumstances of her life compel her to develop a plan that would prevent her son from being sent into the orphanage after her death. It is the protagonist's intention to realize this plan during one of the gatherings of their circle, during which the culmination of the story occurs.

I think it is significant and even symbolic that it happens on Easter Sunday, one of the most important dates in the Christian calendar, the day of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. For on this particular day the protagonist of "Our Crowd" decides to play the role of a fool to ensure a future for her only son.

We remember that all the customary meetings of the circle for many years have been taking place on Friday, which, according to the Bible, is the day of Christ's death on the cross, and therefore does not fit with the protagonist's plan to save her son. She chooses another date for the fulfillment of her plan that is Easter Sunday. This is the day of victory over death, of resurrection, and is therefore a much more appropriate day for her plan to come to fruition. It could be argued thus that the day of Easter Sunday has been purposely chosen to call attention to the underlying religious discourse of the narrative.

The theme of Easter, reflected in the story, is an essential motif of Russian hagiography. James Halliday has also stressed a particular significance of Easter in the context of "Our Circle". He affirms that "although the Easter theme is treated in a 'secular' way, the associations of Christ's self-sacrifice made to redeem the world inevitably come to the fore" (Halliday 53). He goes on further to specify that the protagonist's situation is particularly affecting in this story because, "like the figure of Christ, she is blameless, yet has been marked out for suffering by her genetic inheritance and by her moral attitudes" (Halliday 54).

I support the abovementioned opinion, and moreover, I would contend that the last gathering in the house of the narrator-protagonist echoes the story of the Last

Supper of Jesus Christ from the New Testament. The protagonist invites guests, "her circle" including her newly-wed ex-husband and Marisha. She herself prepares the meal with special care. Here are "the friends" who have betrayed her, sitting at her table, and she is offering them her meal and drinks. We have red wine, cabbage pies, and other dishes on the feast table covered by a white tablecloth. This scene can indeed be interpreted as an indirect Biblical allusion discussed by Riccardo Picchio, in his work *The Function of Biblical Thematic Clues in the Literary Code of "Slavia Orthodoxa."* Similarly to the writings of Russian hagiography, the imagery of Petrushevskaia's "Our Crowd" has been shown to contain indirect Biblical allusions, which provide a key to understanding the essential ideas of the work.

The protagonist's behavior during the entire party is scandalous: she makes sarcastic jokes, deliberately provokes her guests' anger and irritation by asking rude questions and challenging them by telling "the truth". She confronts the new wife of her ex-husband Kolia with a tactless, but straightforward question: "Marisha, do you have something to sleep on with my husband? I gather you gave some of your sheets to Serge." She asks Nadia if it's true that she has a false eye. She annoys Tania and Marisha with the comments about Sonechka (Marisha's daughter) and Tanya's son sleeping together. Addressing Tania, she sarcastically remarks: "It's fine for you, you've got a boy, but it's worse for Marisha, Marisha, have you already taught Sonechka to take precautions?" Finally, she declares to her husband Kolia in front of everybody that she intends to send their seven-year old son Alesha to the orphanage in the town of Borovsk, showing the filled in forms as evidence.

She is obviously a social outcast, and similar to the holy fools, she consciously opposes herself to those surrounding her. She voluntary accepts humiliation and disrespect from her circle. She is repeatedly called "fool," "stupid fool" or "brazen fool" (Petrushevskaia 21-23). Andrei-the-Stoolpigeon repeating Serge's words, announces: "I have extremely negative feelings toward you!" Everybody considers her to be a cruel and heartless mother.

The most affecting moment comes when Kolia opens an entrance door and "the crowd" sees sick Alesha sleeping on the stairs. At that moment the protagonist starts yelling and hitting him across the face so hard that "blood started flowing from child's nose," and not being fully awake yet, he began to choke (Petrushevskaia 23). Everybody is shocked and Kolia takes Alesha saying: "Alyoshka! Alyoshka! That's it! I'm taking you away! That's it! Wherever the hell it might be–anywhere would be better. Just not here! What scum!" (Petrushevskaia 23). Nadia is shouting: "I'll kill her with my bare hands! Lord! What a monster!" but she "sat like a stone" and "she didn't care".

The protagonist sacrifices herself and her being with her only child, whom she loves, in order to ensure his future well-being. The price she is ready to pay is quite high. She is losing her reputation and respect among her former friends, who will not remember her with kindness, and she will spend the last days of her life alone, isolated from the dearest person she had - her son. She voluntary accepts those sufferings and hopes that one day her son will come to her grave and forgive her for being violent to him. As Halliday rightly observes, "far from being cynical

and uncaring, she appears as a woman who has endured her full share of grief and who emerges from it in a spirit almost lyrical resignation, satisfied that she has done her duty by her son" (54).

Those self-sacrificial actions of the heroine, in my view, are typologically similar to the actions of characters from Biblical and hagiographical writings, where the values of personal sacrifice and love for humanity are placed at the very forefront, and where personal deprivation is put forth as a virtue essential to eternal salvation.

It can be argued that the protagonist of "Our Crowd" manifests certain features of the holy fools represented in Russian hagiography. Her deliberately provoking scandalous behavior, her freedom to tell the truth about ugliness of the world around her, and her voluntary acceptance of humiliation and suffering parallels her mode of behavior to that practiced by the holy fools, as it has been discussed by scholars and illustrated in saints lives.

Besides the abovementioned, there are a number of other sub-textual components that reveal a non-literal meaning in the story that would support my assertions about the image of the protagonist. For example, upon closer examination of the story, I have observed that many characters are described with various kinds of unhealthy conditions. They appear to be either physically, or morally, or mentally distorted. The protagonist's eyesight is deteriorated, Nadia has a glass eye, which periodically falls out on her cheek, Aniuta has a "mysterious illness" -'yadovitost'

(symptoms of poisoning), the policeman Valera has a shoulder injury, the protagonist's son Alesha has rotten teeth, etc.

Halliday has also noticed the emphasis in Petrushevskaia's "Our Crowd" on the depiction of characters' unhealthy conditions and eye disorders in particular and attempted to interpret their meaning for the story. He believes, for instance, that "Nadia's disorder is symbolic of awareness of the true nature of society, matched by a willingness to turn a blind eye to it so long as the system provides personal benefits for her" (46). While I agree with Halliday's interpretation, I do also think that those motifs can also be linked to one of the most profoundly abundant themes in spiritual and Biblical prose, that of "sin and its effects."

Sin in Biblical, Christian and Jewish Wisdom literature is evidenced in spiritual and physical disease and later death. The Apostle Paul declared in his Epistle to the Romans, "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is life." Sin, as the transgression of God's laws, is connected in Spiritual Writings to a slow creeping progression leading to eventual death. Blindness, leprosy, palsy are connected in the minds of the Biblical writers to that disconnection of man from God as the source of moral and physical health and life. Physical decay, disease and malformation have found a metaphorical union in the Holy Writings with spiritual disease and dysfunction.

According to the Bible, Jesus the Savior (the Son of God) cures mankind from sin and defect and delivers himself as an exemplar in the manner of his perfect life for his followers to emulate. A significant emphasis in the ministry and message

of Jesus as recorded in the New Testament writings is devoted to curing disease, ending suffering and even restoring life. According to the Bible, Jesus restored sight to the blind men (Matthew 9:27-31), cured the deaf and dumb (Mark 7:31-37), restored the lunatic (Luke 9:37-43), and healed the nobleman's son John 4:46-54.

It appears that God, through his Son's earthly work, demonstrates his desire to reverse the decay, malformation and death, both spiritual and physical, that humanity suffers from. Jesus said, "I am the way the truth and the life, no man cometh unto the Father but by me" (John 14:6). Here he declares himself as the way to God – healing and life eternal – an escape from sin, suffering, decay, disease, and death. Therefore, Petrushevskaia could utilize the already established metaphoric code, originated in earlier Biblical and hagiographical writings, to introduce similar themes into more secular works and at once ensure that the meaning will be understood without being directly spoken.

Illness and/or physical deformity or handicap has also appeared to be a characteristic of a number of holy fools depicted in hagiography and later on in nineteenth and twentieth-century Russian literature. It has been traditionally believed that "*iurodivyi*" was a physically deformed and/or mentally handicapped person. George Fedotov, for instance, describes health or mental condition as one of the essential features of holy fools, which often contributes to assuming their feat (34). Among examples from hagiography is that of Pelagia Ivanovna Serebrenikova (1809-1884), who had never fully recovered from a childhood disease and eventually became a fool in Christ (Kobets, "The Subject of Christian Asceticism" 662). In

nineteenth-century Russian literature, Dostoevsky's Prince Myshkin suffers from epilepsy and arrives in St. Petersburg after spending four years in a mental institution. The protagonist of "Our Crowd," who appears to resemble holy fools, also suffers from an illness that will eventually lead to her blindness and even death. I believe that the depiction of unhealthy/abnormal conditions has acquired a similar metaphorical meaning in Petrushevskaia's "Our Crowd," and it illustrates another convergence of this narrative with hagiographical and Biblical writings.

The theme of death is another hagiographical *topos* repeatedly stressed in "Our Crowd" as well as in many others Petrushevskaia's works. Halliday suggests that the introduction to the notion of death is represented in a scene when the narrator and her husband Kolia come back home from one of their Friday gatherings after midnight, and they find their son Alesha is sitting in front of the television because he is afraid to sleep alone and to turn off the light (47). Alesha'a fear of darkness, in Halliday's view, serves as "an introduction to the notion of death" (40). "Apparently his grandparents' ghosts rose before him, my father and mother had brought him up, pampered him and raised him, and now Ayoshka was left completely alone" (Petrushevskaia 14).

Furthermore, the concept of death is evident throughout the entire narrative. It is conveyed through the story of the sudden and accidental death of Marisha's father, who was run down by a car right near his daughter's apartment building. Then it is emphasized through the depiction of the slow death of the protagonist's mother – "у меня в тот период тихо догорела мать, растаяла с восьмидесяти

килограмм до двадцати семи" ("Svoi Krug" 227) [During that same period my mother quietly slipped away; she dwindled from 176 pounds to 60], and shortly after that the protagonist's father death:

> Then my father died, utterly crushed by grief, an easy and lucky death from a heart attack in his sleep, so that when I got up to cover Alyoshka with his blanket during the night, I saw that Dad wasn't breathing. I went back to bed, and lay there till morning, when I saw Alyoshka off to school, then Dad to the hospital morgue (Petrushevskaia 17)

Besides, as I have mentioned before, the protagonist herself discovers that she is gradually growing blind from the same hereditary kidney disease that killed her mother:

> That day I was having my retina examined, which showed the beginning of the inherited disease that my mother had died of. To be more precise, the doctor didn't make a definite diagnosis, but she did prescribe the same drops mother had taken, and she scheduled the same analyses (Petrushevskaia 19)

On the weekend before the party the heroine takes her son Alesha to the cemetery to visit the graveyard of her parents. They plant and water the flowers and eat eggs, bread, and apples while sitting near the grave. Here another very important Orthodox tradition that of funeral feasts finds its reflection in the story. It is very common even nowadays, for Orthodox Slavic people to come to the cemetery at Easter time (more often a weekend after Easter) to decorate the graves and share meals with their dead relatives. After those funerals feasts people leave an egg, a piece of bread, and cookies at the grave, and beggars are later endowed with these handouts.

The scene of visiting the cemetery and the thoughts of the heroine, who has just realized that she is dying are really remarkable, and it re-introduces the theme of immortality after physical death (Halliday 54).

> We've kept the tradition of Easter picnics in the cemeteries when everything seems to have finally worked out fine in the long run, the dead lie there nicely, people drink to them, the graves are neat, the air is fresh, nobody is forgotten and nothing is forgotten, and it will be the same with everybody, everything will pass and end just as peacefully and happily, with paper flowers, photographs on ceramic, birds in the air, and painted eggs right there in the earth (Petrushevskaia 19)

This motif traces the protagonist's image to the characters of hagiography and holy fools in particular, whose personality and the actual meaning of their deeds have often revealed themselves, only after their physical death. For instance, the Blessed Xenia, a Holy Fool in Christ, was often humiliated by people during her life, and was recognized as both a virtuous person and a saint only after her death. A chapel was built over her grave, and it was believed that through prayers to St. Xenia many people have been healed of serious illnesses or it has helped them find jobs or places to live. For 200 years people have been turning to the Blessed Xenia for help. Her great spiritual power and her deep love for people transcend the grave and are manifested daily. She has become one of the most popular of God's "chosen ones" and was canonized in 1978 by the Russian Church in exile and later on by the All-Russian Church Council.

Svitlana Kobets in her article "Iurodstvo" also remarks that "the holy fool's saintly status, just like that of Christ, is recognized only after his death. And, like Christ's, the holy fool's divine wisdom is always taken for folly" (par 8).

The concepts of life after physical death and acknowledgement after the death are articulated masterfully in Petrushevskaia's story. The protagonist hopes her son Alesha will forgive her for the cruel manner of her last meeting with him - "for hitting him on the face instead of blessing him" (Petrushevskaia 24). She hopes he will remember her after her death and will "figure out" the real meaning of her deeds. This idea is expressed in the final passage of the story, and it also reveals the true nature of protagonist's attitude towards her circle – the "drunken crowd":

> Alesha, I think will visit me on the first day of Easter, that's what I mentally agreed to with him, showing him the way and the day. I think he'll figure out, he's a very perceptive boy, and there among the painted eggs, among the plastic wreath and the rumpled, drunken crowd he'll forgive me for not having let him to say good-bye, and for hitting him on the face instead of blessing him. But it's better this way-for everybody. I'm smart, I understand things. (Petrushevskaia 24)

The protagonist predicts what will happen in eight years and after her death. Watching her "crowd" leaving the apartment building, she shares her thoughts with the reader. She realizes that they will keep Alesha away from her, but he will be surrounded with their attention and care. In the concluding passage, as Josephine Woll notes in "The Minotaur in the Maze: Remarks on Lyudmila Petrushevskaia," the events are conveyed via prolepsis (foreshadowing), and the protagonist "is narrating from beyond the grave" (127), foreseeing the ways in which each of the characters will look after her son:

> The Kolia who took Alesha in his arms is no longer the Kolia who'd hit a seven-year-old child flat across the face only because he'd wet himself. Marisha will also love and feel sorry for little Alesha with his rotten teeth, who hasn't shown the slightest bit of talent. And Zhora, who'll be rich in the future, will throw something his way from his means and bounties, and the next thing you'll know, he'll get Alesha into an institute. (Petrushevskaia 24)

In the conclusion to the story, she finally directly reveals the reasons for her actions and states:

> I've already arranged his fate at a very cheap price. Otherwise after my death he'd have gone from one boarding school to another and would have had a hard time being received as a visitor in his father's own home. When I sent him off to our garden plot, I simply didn't give him the key to the cabin there, and he was forced to come back, but I'd forbidden him to knock on the door, and I'd already taught him in his age to understand when something was forbidden. And the whole child-beating scene, which didn't cost me much effort, gave a push to a long, new romantic tradition in my orphan Alesha's life with his noble, new foster-parents, who'll forget their own interests, but will watch over his. That's how I calculated it all, and that's the way it will be. (Petrushevskaia 24)

Helena Goscilo in her article "Mother as Mothra" points out that Petrushevskaia's story "Our Crowd" demonstrates her mastery of allusion and hint (104). Indeed, as we have observed, Petrushevskaia's prose is replete with wide ranging intertexts on the level of echoes, verbatim quotes, irony, sarcasm, and the grotesque.

While being an essential attribute of postmodern literature, intertextuality as has been discussed earlier in this thesis, it is also a component of the poetics in Old East Slavic hagiography. The difference lies in the fact that medieval texts contain mainly Biblical allusions (Riccardo Picchio), whereas Petrushevskaia's story has a number of other allusions to politics, literature and religion. For example, the beginning of the story, according to Goscilo, echoes Dostoevsky's *Underground*

Man, "I'm a hard, harsh person, always with a smile on my full rosy lips and a sneer for everyone. [...] I am a very clever woman. What I don't understand, that doesn't exist at all (Petrushevskaia 1995, 3).

The following passage contains other vivid examples of intertextuality in "Our Crowd":

> Is it ten or fifteen years since those Fridays started? Is it the Czech, Polish, Chinese, or Yugoslavian events that have rolled by? Such and such trials took place, then the trials of the people who'd protested the results of the first trials, then the trials of the people who'd collected money for the families of prisoners in the camps-all that flashed by (Petrushevskaia 9).

The allusion to "Czech, Polish, Chinese, or Yugoslavian events that have rolled by" likely relates to the political events in those countries during the 1960s-70s: Czechoslovakia 1968th invasion by Warsaw Pact troops that ended the efforts of leaders to liberalize party rule and create "socialism with a human face" during the "Prague Spring," the political events in Poland, where Gomułka's government announced massive increases in the prices of basic foodstuffs, that resulted in wide-spread protests led to major change in the government, that led to the Golden Age of Communist Poland under Edward Gierek, and finally, "the Chinese event" is likely alluding to the pro-communist resurgence in China by Mao Zedong. "The trials" in "Our Crowd" is most likely a reference to the trials and imprisonment of political dissidents - events that took place in USSR in the 1960s and 1970s.

Satire, sarcasm, irony, and the grotesque are the other types of Petrushevskaia's poetics, which have allowed us to enter the subtexts of philosophical content in "Our Crowd". Irony occurs where the author employs the

words to express something different from and often opposite to their literal meaning. Therefore, the protagonist's words, framing the narration ("I'm very smart"/"I'm smart. I understand things") may also imply the opposite statement: "I am a fool," that again likens the heroine to the cadre of the holy fools. Petrushevskaia's use of humorous discourse of "Our Crowd" is used as an effective tool to evoke thought on a theme that the author wants the reader to consider more deeply. Melissa T. Smith in her work "Waiting in the Wings: Russian Women Playwrights in the Twentieth Century" points out that "an undercurrent of the absurd and grotesque runs throughout Petrushevskaia's works" (197).

Natalia Ivanova in her essay titled "Bakhtin's Concept of the Grotesque and the Art of Petrushevskaia and Tolstaya" also identifies the grotesque as a peculiarity of the artistic method of Liudmila Petrushevskaia, and states that the structural principle of Petrushevskaia's grotesque is "the ambivalence (duality) associated with its formation, the integrated, unified depiction simultaneously of both poles of phenomena and process: the old and the new, death and birth" (30).

It is through irony, sarcasm and even the grotesque that Petrushevskaia attempts to express unspoken ideas and themes in her story. Obviously, the laughter in "Our Crowd" acquires not an entertaining, but a metaphysical significance, and it is "one of the most fundamental forms of truth about the world as a whole" (Ivanova 2). In my view, Petrushevskaia's story "Our Crowd" can be considered parabolic in its nature that links this story with hagiographical and Biblical writings. Ancient Biblical stories are often revealed in parables and Jesus Christ also spoke in parables.

Hagiographical and Biblical topoi have been shown to be an integral part of the subtexts of Petrushevskaia's "Our Crowd," and they provide a key to understanding the main idea of the story: to destroy the notion of intelligentsia as "the barriers of moral standards" and emphasize the atmosphere of spiritual poverty in a society where "drunkenness, loneliness and despair abound" (Dalton-Brown 4). This role of the accuser and revealer of the truth, likewise the medieval society, is given to the holy fool, exemplified by the protagonist-narrator in "Our Crowd".

In conversation with Sigrid McLaughlin in 1986, Petrushevskaia remarked on how she would like her works to be read: "There are three steps in understanding my works: the first is to realize what miserable creatures these people [in the story or drama] are; the second is to feel sorry for them' and the third is to recognize yourself in them. My stories ask: can one really live that way? And the sensitive reader will answer: No. His task then is to discover how to live differently. [...] The task is to remain human under all circumstances" (McLaughlin 98)

In this chapter I have examined in detail the secular narrative of post-Soviet writer Liudmila Petrushevskaia's "Our Crowd" for the presence of hagiographical and Biblical motifs. I have particularly focused on Petrushevskaia's interpretation of the following three principal themes of Old Slavic hagiography: the theme of suffering, the theme of self-sacrifice, and the theme of death. I have discovered that the protagonist-narrator of Petrushevskaia's "Our Crowd," similarly to the heroine of Tolstaya's "Sonia," exhibits some of the characteristics of a holy fool, a hero of Old Russian Hagiography.

I have also attempted to demonstrate that the story "Our Crowd" contains a multitude of intertextual references, both overt and covert, to literature, politics, and folklore. In my examination, I have attempted to uncover and elaborate upon indirect allusions to the Holy Writings of the Old and New Testaments in Petrushevskaia's story, as these writings constitute the foundation and source of Old Slavic Literature as well. The next chapter of my thesis is dedicated to a discussion of hagiographical traditions in the works of another post-Soviet writer, Victor Erofeev.

Chapter III

"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do": Non-resistance to evil in Viktor Erofeev's "Galoshes".

In this chapter, I shall continue my discussion of medieval Russian literary traditions in the works of contemporary Russian writers. In particular, I shall investigate the transformation of medieval hagiographical themes in the writings of another well-known post-Soviet writer, Viktor Erofeev. A literary critic and essayist, as well as a writer of prose Viktor Erofeev is another representative of the postmodernist trend in Russian literature. This chapter is devoted to an analysis of his short story "Galoshes," which can justifiably be considered a contemporary adaptation of the medieval hagiographical writing. As with my study of the works of Liudmila Petrushevskaia and Tatiana Tolstaia, I shall conduct an examination of Erofeev's treatment of the motifs of suffering, sacrifice, and death in the narrative. I shall also attempt to demonstrate that Erofeev's "Galoshes," is part of a tradition dating to nineteenth century Russian literature, particularly to Nikolai Gogol's well-known short story "The Overcoat". "The Overcoat" is important for my research because the narrative, according to some scholars, contains a significant number of hagiographical motifs and imagery and can even be read as a "worldly" adaptation of the New Testament story of Jesus Christ. It is my intention in this chapter to illustrate the connection of Erofeev's short story with hagiographical writings through a detailed analysis of the Christian topoi in "Galoshes" as well as through a

comparison with the usage of hagiographical and religious subtexts in Gogol's "The Overcoat".

The short story "Galoshes" was first published in journal *Iunost* (Youth) in 1988. At the first glance, it is an ordinary story about a schoolboy, persecuted and humiliated by his classmates and teachers. Upon closer examination, however, the deeper philosophical meaning of the story begins to emerge, and a number of incorporated intertexts serve to uncover a profound metaphorical meaning. "Galoshes" is presented by an anonymous narrator in the idiosyncratic *skaz style*, which, according to Mark Lipovetsky, "binds together the locutions of different eras, weaving together paraphrases of classical texts with parodies of current *belles lettres*" in Erofeev's works (165). The protagonist of the story is anonymous as well.

The narration of "Galoshes" is not consistent. There are no apparent connections between the various episodes of the story until the whole narrative is read. It resembles a series of snapshots mixed within one narrative. The story's unique postmodern structure rejects the traditional canons of chronological plot, continuous narrative, and omniscient narrator in favor of fragmented forms and discontinuous narratives (Barry 7). In this respect, there is a clear contrast between Erofeev's narrative and hagiographical writing where the textual materials, as I stated in Chapter I, are usually arranged in chronological order, following the established canons of literary etiquette (Likhachev, 12).

To begin, I shall outline the basic events of Erofeev's story. "Galoshes" opens with the death of a small boy: a third-grader is throwing stones at a boy who is

desperately trying to get away; a stone hits the boy's head and causes the boy to fall from the fire escape he is climbing. The narration then switches to a school setting, where we are introduced to the principal, the literature teacher Izia Moiseevich, and the elementary teacher Zoia Nikolayevna. This shift seems quite irrelevant at first.

The story then introduces a worker, who is taking holiday decorations away from an apartment balcony, and then we are brought back to school, where Zoia Nikolayevna is discussing a book by Ilia Erenburg with Izia Moiseevich. Finally, we see the protagonist of the story, a little boy, getting ready for school.

His grandmother, who "had survived the great siege of Leningrad and had weak nerves," (Erofeev 31) forces the boy to put on his galoshes. The boy resists wearing the galoshes because he realizes that it would make him the object of ridicule amoung his peers, since galoshes are traditionally associated with the weak and helpless. Galoshes, also known as rubbers in North America, are a type of rubber boots that one wears over shoes or boots to keep them from getting wet or muddy. Swallowing his tears and carrying a heavy bag, the boy walks to school through snow and rain. In the school locker-room, some boys beat him and toss his belongings around. The bell rings, and the boy stands in confusion, not knowing what to do with his galoshes. He is afraid to leave them in the locker room, as he imagines "the shouting mouth of his Granny," if these galoshes should be stolen. He decides to put them into his trouser pockets, and then rushes to his classroom.

The teacher, Zoia Nikolayevna, notices something sticking out of the boy's pocket, and in front of the whole class, she pulls out the galoshes from the boy's

pockets and shows them to the other students. The class and the teacher start laughing, "squealing and barking" (Erofeev 1988, 31). The boy asks God to forgive everybody. The teacher notices a halo above the boy's head. The principal appears in the classroom, calls Zoia Nikolayevna into the corridor, and proposes marriage to her. She then falls down the fire escape.

These are the basic events of Erofeev's "Galoshes". The story is only a few pages in length, but it encourages the reader to acknowledge the complex relationships between teachers and students, the principal and teachers, the principal and students, and students and their peers. Viktor Erofeev is revisiting the traditional Russian literary theme, where a "little person" has to deal with an authority figure within a social institution. The tragedy of "a little person" in a world of malice also lays at a heart of Gogol's masterful story "The Overcoat," which centers on the life and death of Akaky Akakievich, an impoverished clerk who makes great sacrifices to attain an overcoat of untold value and then dies of grief after it is stolen on the first day he wears it.

Besides those surface themes of the stories, the presence of hagiographical *topoi*, which bring into the texts a religious dimension, is another important characteristic that unites the two stories, written in different centuries. Hagiographical and Biblical motifs, namely the motifs of suffering, non-resistance, forgiveness, and death are scattered in those narratives and play a significant role in the stories' interpretations.

The symbolic hagiographical undertones of "The Overcoat" have been noted by a number of literary critics (Driessen, 1965; Chizhevskiy, 1976; Mochul'skiy, 1976; Surkov, 1982; Peuranen, 1984; Linevsky, 1993; De Lotto, 1993). The scholars have stressed the important role of spiritual writings, including the saints' lives, in Gogol's story and provided specific and convincing examples of the use of hagiographical elements in this narrative. For example, John Schillinger suggests that Gogol is echoing a specific saint's life and parodying the hagiographical tradition, as we shall see further in this chapter.

I would argue that Viktor Erofeev, in "Galoshes," continues this practice, common to 19th-century Russian writers, of employing the rich heritage of Old Slavic literature to create powerful literary works. As with Gogol's "The Overcoat," the form of Erofeev's "Galoshes" could be considered the *exemplum*, 'a short story used to illustrate a moral'. According to a dictionary of the literary terms, an *exemplum* teaches by providing an *exemplar*, a model of behavior that the reader should imitate, or by providing an example of bad behavior that the reader should avoid. Hagiographical texts also use Biblical stories and historical allusions as *exempla,* and didacticism is discussed as one of the main principles of the artistic method of Old Slavic literature (Kuskov 22).

Though they are often absent or hidden in contemporary society, the fundamental concepts of hagiographical and scriptural writings, particularly those of non-resistance and the voluntary acceptance of suffering, re-surface in the Erofeev story. The concept of non-resistance finds a historical origin nearly two millennia

ago with Jesus Christ declaring to his hearers, "You should not resist an evil person, but whoever smites you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also" and so recorded in the Christian New Testament (Matthew 5:39).

According to this Christian code of behavior, we are to love our neighbors– "for love works no ill to one's *neighbor*" (Romans 13:10). We are to love our enemies – and are "to bless those who curse us, to do good to those who hate us, and pray for those who spitefully use us" (Matthew 5:44). We are not to retaliate or to seek revenge. A Biblical admonition is recorded in the Epistle of Paul to the Romans; when the Apostle instructs Christians, "Repay no one evil for evil" (Romans 12:17). Instead, the followers of Christ are to "overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:21). These fundamental Christian principles echo through the centuries in the prose of contemporary Russian writers and are articulated in Erofeev's "Galoshes" as well.

The lives of the saints, based on the life of Christ and the Bible as their principal sources of reference, stress the concept of non-resistance. I have discussed in the chapter on Liudmila Petrushevskaia one of the earliest Old East Slavic hagiographical texts "The Martyrdom of Boris and Gleb" as an exemplar of the application of this concept in hagiography. Other saints' lives similarly advance this Christian mode of living.

In "The Life of Blessed Xenia of St. Petersburg," while wandering through the streets of St. Petersburg, Xenia was often subjected to people's derision and maltreatment. However, during those moments, as it is stated in the hagiographical

narrative, "she kept before her the image of the guiltless Great Sufferer, Christ Jesus, who, without a murmur, heard all accusations, bore all persecutions and suffered terrible torture and crucifixion" (*The Life of Blessed Xenia* par. 9). Xenia endeavors to bear her hardships meekly and in silence, forgiving offenses in accordance with the teaching of Jesus.

A number of the episodes in "Galoshes" allude to this theme as well and reacquaint the reader with the message of non-resistance to violence and voluntary acceptance of suffering. The story opens with the portrayal of the boy's acceptance of death rather than, as would seem natural, an active resistance to the injustice, violence and cruelty directed toward him:

> Мальчик судорожно вцепился в пожарную лестницу. Выше лезть было страшно, спускаться-боялся камней. Третьеклассник стоял внизу и швырял в него камни. Один камень попал в спину, другой-в плечо, третий, наконец, угодил в затылок. Он слабо вскрикнул и полетел спиной вниз. (Erofeev 31)
>
> The boy feverishly grabbed hold of the fire escape. He was afraid of climbing higher, and as for going down, he was afraid of the stones. The third-grader stood below and threw rocks at him. One rock hit his back, the other hit his shoulder, the third, finally, ended up hitting the back of his head. He shouted weakly and fell down backwards.

The locker room scene provides a vivid illustration of the Christian model of behavior as exemplified by the character of the little boy. In that scene, the third-grader spits in the boy's face, damages his peak-cap, throws his bag around, dumps its contents on the floor, and kicks the boy in the backside while the abused boy does nothing to resist or protect himself.

> Мальчик повесил пальто на вешалку, с него сбили фуражку, он бросился подбирать. Ее стали гонять, как мяч. Забили в угол. Он наклонился и получил ногой под зад. Обернулся. Третьеклассник добродушно плюнул ему в лицо. Он ничего не сказал, отвернулся, утерся, кто-то ударил ногой по тяжелому портфелю, портфель вылетел из рук, расстегнулся, из него выпали учебники, тетрадки, пенал. Он стал все это подбирать. (Erofeev 30)

> The boy hung up his coat on a hanger, his peak-cap was knocked down, he rushed to pick it up. It began to be driven like a ball. It was hammered to the corner. He bent and then received a kick under his backside. He turned around. A third-grader genially spat in his face. He said nothing, turned away and wiped himself. Somebody kicked his heavy bag. The bag flew out of his hands, became unfastened. Textbooks, exercise books and a pencil-case dropped out of it. He began collecting all these things.

The protagonist of "Galoshes" does not offer even the slightest resistance to the unjust violence inflicted on him. He is spat upon, kicked, and humiliated. The unrequited abuse and lack of response to acts of contempt toward him (particularly being spat upon) form parallels to acts of execration toward Jesus Christ and some others as recorded in narratives of saints' lives. We read in the Bible the following lines: "Then did they spit in his face, and buffeted him; and others smote him with the palms of their hands" (Matthew 26:67). Similar to Boris and Gleb from "The Martyrdom of Boris and Gleb," and Xenia from "The Life of Blessed Xenia of St. Petersburg" the little boy in "Galoshes" embodies the attribute of "innocent suffering," which is one of the most important characteristics of the Russian saint (Naletova 14).

The boy's treatment by his peers and teachers is remarkably similar to the circumstances the protagonist of Gogol's story is subject to. Akakii Akakievich Bashmachkin in "The Overcoat" is noticeably "different" from his fellow

bureaucrats. He is also not accepted by those around him and is a social outcast. Gogol states in his story, "No respect was shown to him in the department. His superiors treated him with a sort of domineering chilliness" (Gogol 6). Similar to the boy's treatment in Erofeev's story, "the young officials jeered at and made jokes of Akakii Akakievich" (6), but he answered not a word, and "it even had no effect upon his work: amid all these annoyances he never made a single mistake in his copying" (Gogol 6). He is just surprised that "there is so much inhumanity [...] in those whom the world accepts as honorable and noble" (Gogol 7). Only when the angry joking became "wholly unbearable, as when they jogged his hand and prevented him from attending to his work, he would exclaim, "Leave me alone! Why do you insult me? I am your brother" ["Оставьте меня, зачем вы меня обижаете?"] (Gogol 22).

This final statement of Akakii echoes, to some degree, Jesus's last words about his tormentors, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do". An inimitable example of this aspect of resonating Christian behavior occurs when Erofeev's protagonist addresses his classmates and the teacher in one of the most gripping scenes in "Galoshes".

The boy openly articulates a clear message of Christian love, forgiveness, and non-resistance to violence to his classmates and to his teacher Zoia Nikolayevna. It is expressed in a passage when the whole class along with the teacher are laughing, "squealing," and "barking," at the boy – "the cause of the event and a general laughing stock," whereas he stands near the teacher's table and whimpers "desperately and selflessly": "Господи, - шептал мальчик, - прости их. Господи,

прости их и помилуй! Они невинные, добрые, они хорошие, Господи! [My God, – the boy whispered – forgive them. My God, forgive them and pardon them! They are innocent, kind, they are good, My God!" (Erofeev 6)

Those words of this little boy represent a direct allusion to New Testament writings – "then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots" (Luke 23:34). This plea, which is incorporated in a number of saints' lives, is Jesus' last earthy prayer and is a disclosure of his own heart and reveals the depth of his love for humanity. Jesus Christ taught his followers, "Love your enemies," and he demonstrated his love in his own attitude towards his crucifiers, by praying for those who hated him. Jesus died for the sins of all the sinners of the world, and in essence, was asking God to forgive every man, woman, and child who had ever sinned and whose sins brought him to his crucifixion. In the same way, the boy in Erofeev's story "Galoshes" prays for those who persecute him and asks God for their forgiveness: "Я их люблю. Господи! - шептал мальчик" ["I love them, God!" the boy whispered]. His image is transfigured in the story, and he becomes one of the martyrs, who stand as a witness against a world of evil and malice that is represented by the teacher, the students, and even the principal of his school.

Mark Lipovetsky, in his book "Russian Postmodernist Fiction: A Dialogue with Chaos," states that it is typical for Viktor Erofeev to allocate "the position of the martyr, which turns out to be the only reliable one in the contemporary world of evil…to a child, who traditionally embodies the renewal of life" (171). In my view,

the role of a martyr here is assigned to a child not inadvertently. He is an innocent, unpretentious and sincere creature who naturally tells the truth.

It is no wonder that one of the best-known Russian aphorisms says "Устами младенца глаголит истина" [The truth comes from the babe's mouth]. This also alludes to Christian New Testament, which says: "Yea; have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings, thou hast perfected praise?" (Matt. 24:16). According to the Matthew Henry's *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Jesus draws particular satisfaction from the guileless devotion of little children; "praise is perfected out of the mouth of such; it has a peculiar tendency to the honour and glory of God for little children to join in his praises. When great things are brought about the weak and unlikely instruments, God is thereby much honoured, for his strength is perfected in weaknesses"(1310).

Viktor Erofeev thus offers a "saintly" child in the role of the martyr, presenting the image of an innocuous little boy in much the same way that Tolstoy presents his own version of martyrdom in *iurodivyj* Grisha in *Childhood*, or that Pushkin presents the beggar in *Boris Godunov*, and finally as Gogol depicts the clerk Akakii Akakievich in "The Overcoat".

The narrative's title is often meaningful in interpreting the author's ideas. In Erofeev's story, the galoshes serve to set the boy apart from his peers and are one of the reasons his classmates bully him. In my view, the galoshes stand as a symbol of the material distinctions (in contrast to spirituality) that cause the world to be malicious. The title also echoes the last name of the protagonist of Gogol's story,

Bashmachkin, a surname formed from the word "башмак," a type of shoe often worn by a child, or this word is sometimes used to express derogatory statement in Russian about one's shoes.

The Russian title of the Gogol story "Shinel'" is translated into English as "The Overcoat" or "The Greatcoat," and it has two basic meanings: first, it is a uniform worn by the military or civil servants in Russia, and second, it is "a long piece of clothing worn by monks and nuns", also called a habit (Schillinger 39). The second meaning is of particular importance for our analysis of religious intertexts in Gogol's story and in determining its comparability to Erofeev's "Galoshes". The Erofeev protagonist – the little boy, also wears a "гимнастерка" which is a uniform worn by military and later civil servants in Russia. This article of clothing unites him with the protagonist of Gogol's story Akakii Akakievich, whose garment, as we have already established, can be linked to the outer clothing of monks or other church officials.

Both of the stories have their hagiographical predecessors. The whole story "Galoshes" and particularly, the scene of the protagonist's death, is reminiscent of the story of Saint Stephen, as recorded in the Bible. Stephen was one of the seven deacons of the early Church and became a preacher of the gospel. According to *Easton's Bible Dictionary*, he became the first Christian martyr – the first to be killed because of his faith in Jesus as the Christ. His personal character and history are recorded in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 6:1, 7:59, 60). The story of Stephen's death is likely the archetype for the story of the death of the protagonist in Erofeev's

"Galoshes". As Stephen suffered through his slow torturous death by stoning, he prayed to God to forgive those who were persecuting him, just as Jesus did for those who crucified him and just as the little boy did in Erofeev's story. In the Acts of Apostles we find the following lines about Saint Stephen's death:

> And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus receive my spirit.
> And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep (Acts 7:59,60).

This scene of Saint Stephen's death is remarkably paralleled in the abovementioned opening passage in "Galoshes," when the boy is being stoned by the third-grader: "One rock hit his back, the other hit his shoulder, the third, finally, ended up in the back of his head. He shouted weakly and flew down backwards."

The image of Akakii Akakievich in "The Overcoat" can also be linked, according to some scholars, to his hagiographical prototype. F.C. Driessen, in his 1965 book devoted to the Gogol story, records that he has found eight saints by the name of Akakii in Bukharev's *Lives of All the Saints*, including the sixth-century Saint Akakius of Sinai, who "lived for nine years in the service of a certain evil *starets* [elder] and suffered all insults without complaint, [...] and then after his death appeared to the elder and invited him to repent" (Driessen 194).

This notion of 'suffering from insults without complaint' is, as I have already discussed, the core characteristic of both Erofeev's and Gogol's stories. John Schillinger, in his article titled "Gogol's *The Overcoat* as a Travesty of Hagiography," also posits that Akakii Akakievich shares significant features with

Saint Akakius of Sinai and analyzes hagiographical traditions in Gogol's story. He notes that Akakii Akakievich exhibits exemplary behavior at work, performing a task almost identical to the occupation of the monks – the copying of church documents.

His acceptance of suffering, mistreatment, and humiliation at the hands of his colleagues is compared by the scholar to the sufferings of Saint Akakius of Sinai who was tormented by demons. His clothing is stated to resemble monk's clothing, though here a travesty is noted – Akakii Akakievich "didn't neglect his clothing for ascetic reasons" and "his tattered clothes simply reflect his meager salary" (Schillinger 39). In achieving his goal (of obtaining a new overcoat), Akakii Akakievich exhibits a conduct similar to the ascetic conduct of a monk: he cuts down on his already minimal expenses, omits his evening tea, does not burn candles, and walks carefully to avoid wearing out his shoes. Gogol writes that Akakii Akakievich even "got used to going hungry in the evenings, for he was nourished spiritually, ever bearing in his thoughts the idea of his future overcoat" (Gogol, 67).

Akakii Akakievich's personality traits can in fact be traced back to a number of hagiographical heroes, and the whole story "The Overcoat," is justifiably perceived by a number of critics as a transformation of the story of Jesus Christ. The plot structure of "The Overcoat" could be paralleled to Jesus's life as recorded in the Bible: the circumstances of his human birth, his occupation, the temptation he faced, his betrayal and death, and even, his resurrection.

Akakii Akakievich comes from the humble family of a shoemaker (*Basmachkin*) similar to Jesus, a carpenter's son. In a story only his mother is

mentioned – the father, like that of Jesus, seems hardly to have been present. During his christening, he is given a name Akakii Akakievich, with the important author's commentary that "this may appear an odd name to our reader, and somewhat far-fetched, but we can assure him that no one went out of his way to find it and that, as matters turned out, he simply could not have been called anything else" (Gogol 20). His Godmother says, "Well, it's plain enough, this is his fate. So we had better call him after his father. He was Akakii, so let's call his son Akakievich. And that's how he became Akakievich" (Gogol 20).

The word "akakos" is known to derive from the Greek word *akakios*, which means "guileless," "simple," "innocuous," and "ascetic"(*A Patristic Lexicon* 58). It also has an alternate meaning of "simpleton" or "slow-witted" (*Ibid.*) Such a personal definition would correspond to the Russian "*iurodivyi*" or holy fool. Nothing is mentioned about the protagonist's childhood in "The Overcoat." We are told only that Akakii is, "a clerk of whom it cannot be said he was very remarkable" and is likened to "any chair or other piece of furniture in the Department" (Gogol 3).

Akakii Akakievich becomes subject to temptations from the Devil, which in "The Overcoat" is likely symbolized by St. Petersburg's winter, as many critics have agreed. It is because of the harsh, cold weather that the protagonist is tempted to get a new overcoat, and in Gogol's story this piece of clothing itself turns into symbol of materiality with the tailor - "одноглазый черт" [one-eyed devil] (Gogol 29) as the driving force of this temptation. Yielding to temptation results in punishment. The

is stolen on the first occasion that Akakii Akakievich had it, that has eventually led to his death.

The final passage in "The Overcoat" has significant symbolic meaning, as it basically depicts Akakii Akakievich's "resurrection": "A ghost in the shape of a Government clerk had begun appearing," and he "[is] stripping overcoats off the backs of all sorts of people" (Gogol 44).

Resurrection, a prominent motif of hagiographical and Biblical writings, is another important aspect that prompts us to acknowledge the connection between Gogol's and Erofeev's narratives. Mark Lipovetsky, in his book *Russian Postmodernist Fiction,* commenting on the scene in "Galoshes" where the whole class along with the teacher are hysterically laughing at the boy standing at the teacher's table, argues that "the expanding image of the cruelly laughing class is life itself, in its motley diversity, and a child in this scene-because of his sufferings looks like a saint (the teacher notices a halo around his head). The target of universal malice, he gains a unique perspective from which he can see the future lives of his laughing classmates (172)".

This is masterfully expressed in the following passage, worth quoting almost in its entirety:

> [...] Смеялась Сокина с худенькими ножками, что рано умрет от заражения крови, и курчавая Нюшкина, упавшая в пустую шахту лифта, зато повезло рыжей дуре Труниной: у нее муж – член ЦК, правда, кажется, ВЛКСМ. Повезло и Нелли Петросян: вышла за венгра, всю жизнь будет разговаривать по-венгерски - эгиш- мегиш - непонятный язык!

> Смеется тщедушный Богданов; ему через два года могучим ударом ноги Илья Третьяков - вон он смеется на задней парте! - сломает копчик; смеется сластена Лось, она ябеда, Якименко по пьяному делу выкинется из окна, станет инвалидом, родит двойню; Юдина проживет дольше всех: в день своего девяностолетия она выйдет на коммунальную кухню в пестром купальном костюмчике.. Потрясенные соседи разразятся аплодисментами. Смеялись:...убийца Коля Максимов, он зарежет хозяина голубятни; тряслись от хохота фарцовщик Верченко, ходивший с малых лет клянчить у иностранцев жвачку под гостиницу "Пекин," и Саша Херасков... Прапорщик Щапов, контуженный в колониальной кампании, каратист Чемоданов и Вагнер, безгрудая Вагнер, кукарекали что было мочи. Баклажанова, Муханов и Клышко попадали от хохота в проход, как какие-нибудь фрукты. (Erofeev 1988, 31)

> Sokina, with her thin legs laughed; she will die early from an infection of the blood, and curly Niushkina, who will fall down into the empty shaft of an elevator; but the red-headed fool Trunina was lucky; her husband was a member of the Central Committee (true, of Komsomol)...; Nelli Petrosyan will be lucky too: she will be married to a Hungarian, all her life she will speak the Hungarian: (egish-megish – an incomprehensible language) language!
> Sickly Bogdanov also laughs; – in two years Ilia Tretiakov, here he is, laughing in a back desk, would break his coccyx with a mighty kick; Los' laughs (the sweet tooth), she is a slander, Jakimenko, who while being drunk will throw herself out of a window, become an invalid and will give birth to twins; ... Judina will outlive them all: on her ninetieth birthday, she will walk into the communal kitchen in a colorful bathing suit. The shocked neighbours will burst into applause...They laughed:... the murderer Kolia Maksimov, he will kill the owner of a dovecot, shivered from the laughter of the blackmarketeer Verchenko, who had gone since he was small to beg gum from foreigners at the hotel "Peking," and Sasha Heraskov....Shchapov the warrant officer, who will receive a concussion in the colonial campaign, Chemodanov the karate expert, and Wagner, the breastless Wagner, crowed with all their might. Baklazhanova, Mukhanov, and Klyshko laughed their way into the passageway, like some sort of fruit.

Thus the boy's resurrection may be presumed by the divine demonstration of favor, that being the supernatural placement of a halo around his head, and hence his ability to foresee the grim future of his abusers. As the excerpt shows, none of those people has seemingly become a caring or kind person. We are presented with a

gallery of heartless and self-centered people, who have grown-up to be representatives of a world of greed, malice, and cruelty: Ilia Tretiakov breaks the coccyx of "тщедушный" [sickly] Bogdanov, Jakimenko becomes a drunkard, Kolia Maximov becomes a murderer, and Verchenko - a blackmarketeer. The majority of them, according to the clairvoyance, will suffer a tragic end: Sokina dies early from a blood infection, Jakimenko throws herself out of the window and becomes an invalid, Vasilieva suffers from Basedow's disease.

Foretelling and prophecy is a traditional hagiographical topos, and it is widely used in the lives of the saints. *The Life of Blessed Xenia of St. Petersburg*, for instance, reads: "seeing in Xenia this gift of clairvoyance and her meek and humble way of life, people began to realize that she was a true fool for Christ's sake". A number of instances are described in *The Life* where Xenia is able to see people's future. One example is when she predicts that a foster child will be given to Paraskeva Antonova:

> Entering the house, she looked irritably at Antonova and said, "Here you are sitting and sewing buttons and you don't know that God has given you a son! Go at once to the Smolensk Cemetery!" (par 13)

Soon after that, Antonova witnesses a coachman knocking down a pregnant woman who subsequently gives a birth to a child right there on the street and dies immediately afterwards. The police are unable to discover the identity of the mother or locate the father or other relatives of the orphan. The child remains with Paraskeva Antonova, who provides him with a good upbringing and education, and eventually the boy gives loving care to his foster mother in her old age.

Another episode *in The Life of Blessed Xenia of St. Petersburg*, describes how during a visit to a widow, Mrs. Golubev, and her seventeen-year-old daughter, (whom Xenia liked greatly for her meek nature and kindness), the Blessed Xenia foretells that the girl's future husband will be a doctor. "My beauty, – said Xenia, turning to the girl, – here you are making coffee and your husband is burying his wife in Okhta. Run there quickly!" (par 15) The Golubevs soon see a funeral procession heading for the cemetery in Okhta and join in with the crowd of mourners. A young woman, a doctor's wife, has just died in childbirth and is buried. After the Liturgy, the young widower loses consciousness and falls to the ground near the Golubevs. Both mother and daughter help bring him back to consciousness. In time, this acquaintance leads to the young Golubeva becoming the wife of the widower doctor. This same tradition of foresight is apparent in Erofeev's use of hagiographical clairvoyance in narrating the story of the little boy.

If, in most instances of hagiographical writing, clairvoyance carries a positive message to the people about their future, in "Galoshes" it instead, serves to expose the fates and misdeeds of the story's characters. Erofeev's intention here is to articulate the idea that these people represent a sinful world, and that they will eventually receive their punishment. This portrayal is derived from his personal view that in today's world man is "the source of evil," which forms the "злобытиё" [evil being] in contemporary Russian society (Scoropanova 194). In the introduction to his book *New Russian Writing: Russia's Fleurs du Mal*, Viktor Erofeev writes,

> Evil has expressed itself. As the 20th century draws to a close, the literature of evil has done its work. The ontological market of evil spoils one for choice. Evil's cup runneth o'er with black liquid. What next?" (29).

The motifs of man's alienation, dehumanization, and loss of moral values becomes a dominant theme in many of his publications. He believes that "Язык насилия-единственный язык, на котором человек способен разговаривать сегодня" [The language of violence is the only language that man is able to speak today] (Scoropanova 195).

No wonder that his story "Galoshes" is structured around the opposition of good and evil. The narrative is dominated by a dichotomous perspective of viewing the world: the material opposes the spiritual, and the transient opposes the eternal.

This dichotomy reflects another tradition of medieval hagiographical writing, which I mentioned in the chapter on Tatiana Tolstaia. In Old Russian literature, and in particular in narratives about the saints' lives, the world is strictly divided into the material and the spiritual, reflecting a medieval binary perception of the world. Victor Kuskov emphasizes in *A History of Old Russian Literature*, that "everything in the world, according to the medieval outlook, is divided in two: soul and body, sin and virtue, life and death, eternity and temporality" (19).

In Erofeev's narrative this opposition is reflected as well, and it is expressed through the depiction of the story's protagonists. As in the saints' lives, there are two forces that are clearly opposed to each other. It is not a coincidence that the boy and the principal are both unnamed in "Galoshes" and the significance for the story

is evidence of the author's intent to allow the reader a wider interpretation when considering the two main characters. They offer us symbols for the opposition of good and evil, like God and Satan.

Erofeev portrays those characters differently. He depicts the boy with sympathy and tenderness, which is indicated by the use of diminutive suffices and vocabulary expressing an affection. He uses words like "кулачок," "заспанный мальчик," "коричневые чулочки," "над его стриженной под ноль головкой". The boy's behavior is characterized by kindness, forgiveness, and a non-resistant acceptance of suffering, both spiritual and physical, which, as we have discussed in Chapter 2, constitutes the core of "the kenotic life," as exemplified in the lives of the saints.

The principal, in contrast, is depicted "со зверским лицом" [with a vicious face], or "лицо директора было страшно" [the principal's face was horrifying]. He speaks about love to Zoia Nikolayevna "гоня ей в лицо резкую вонь из мужского рта" by [wafting into her face the sharp stench from his male mouth]. He has an extremely negative attitude toward children. The author notes that "директора мутило от детей" [children made the principal sick] and that "особенно противны были ему благополучные маленькие мальчики, пахнущие детским мылом" [fortunate little boys who smelled of children's soap were especially disgusting to him] (Erofeev 31). In his relationship with his subordinate teachers, the principal also demonstrates his disrespect, anger, and overall despotic nature. He would often clench his fist and exclaim, "Вы у меня вот здесь, в кулаке!" [I have got all of you

here in my fist!] He makes tactless statements to the elementary teacher Zoia Nikolayevna, "Я Вас прошу не как директор, а как мужчина: не носите эти ваши длинные сиреневые панталоны. Они вам не к лицу" [I ask you not as a principal, but as a man, don't wear those long lilac slacks. They don't suit you] (Erofeev 31). As a former military man he uses the same methods of dealing with people at the school: screaming, terror, eavesdropping behind the door. His cruel nature is emphasized by the statement: "Немцев он расстреливал, не задумываясь" [he shot Germans without a moment's thought]. He is a soldier in the old Stalinist order of brutality, repression and censure.

The principal is also shown to be against newer, progressive ideas. When the literature teacher Izia Moiseevitch discusses a book by Ilya Erenburg, most likely his novel *Оттепель* (*The Thaw*, published in 1954), he is dismayed. Upon seeing Izia Moiseevitch, the principal blocks the stairway with his body and angrily exclaims:

> -Вы это самое...бросьте мне тут вашего Эренбурга распространять! Учитель литературы вспыхнул:-Но ведь его все читают!..
> -Все! Вы это мне бросьте: все! (Erofeev 31)
> "You know, stop distributing your Erenburg here!" The literature teacher flashed out, "But in fact, everybody is reading him." "Stop it! That's it!"

The allusion to Erenburg's book is quite meaningful for the story's interpretation as well. Erenburg's *The Thaw* depicts a (symbolic) thaw in human relations, with some discussions of political questions such as anti-Semitism, the Doctor's Plot of 1953, and political dissension and human love. Given the general reference to this book and the character's attitude to it – it is not unreasonable to suggest that Erofeev may have employed it for the development of the character of

the principal and other teachers. Erofeev, in the forum of public thought, may be using these adult characters as foils in order to challenge opposition to the ideas of humanism, openness, tolerance, and even anti-Semitism.

Zoia Nikolayevna, after eventually reading this book, finds it uninteresting and even "boring":

> В конце концов она прочла Эренбурга. Ничего особенного. Речь шла о каких-то художниках. Они спорили между собой. Было скучно. (Erofeev 31)
>
> Eventually she has read Erenburg's book. Nothing special. It was about some artists. They argued among themselves. It was boring.

Zoia Nikolayevna is ironically depicted in the story. She wears "сиреневые панталоны" [lilac trousers], she responds to the teasing of her younger brother "жалким криком раненой птицы" [with a scream of a wounded bird], her reaction to the whole class laughing at the boy is "непедагогический смех" [unpedagogical laughter], and when she sees the halo around boy's head, "ее лицо ужасно поглупело" [her face became awfully stupid]. If we were to determine her position, in relation to the abovementioned opposition of "good and evil" in the story, her indifference, spiritual emptiness, lack of professionalism and understanding would definitely place her closer to the principal's evil realm. She also stands against "the martyr-boy". At the moment, when the whole class is laughing, "squealing" and barking" at him, she becomes one of them, and does nothing to protect this victimized child, who is under her care. As we have observed, Erofeev in "Galoshes" tends to portray his characters in different ways in order to stress the

disparity between their spiritual worlds and in order to draw the reader's attention to the underlying intertexts of the story.

Gogol's story "The Overcoat" is written from a dichotomous perspective as well. Akakii Akakievich is opposed to the tailor Petrovitch, a "one-eyed devil," as his wife often calls him. Besides that, the old overcoat and the new one exist in the story like two worlds and two ways of being. Akakii's attachment to the old overcoat symbolizes the faithfulness to beauty and humanity of his soul, whereas the new one, "with marten around the collar" is an escape temptation to a world where inhumanity rules. Critics of "The Overcoat" have often noted that the image of St. Petersburg and its cold winter bears a symbolic significance in the story and in fact, the Devil is personified in "The Overcoat" as the St. Petersburg winter, which tempts Akakii Akakievich into ordering a new overcoat, a symbol of the world's materiality.

In my view, that same idea finds its reflection in Erofeev's story as well. It is the harsh St. Petersburg weather that prompts the boy's grandmother to insist on his wearing galoshes, the objects, which later become the cause of the boy's humiliation and even of his eventual death. My argument that "Galoshes" is set in St. Petersburg is based on a reference in the story to the boy's grandmother being a "siege survivor" with the indication that she lived in their apartment building even before the War. As well, the elevator-man Petrovich served as a cook for Prince Yusupov in his youth. The Yusupovs were an aristocratic St. Petersburg family that owned the

Yusupov Palace, situated on the Moika, for five generations (today, it is a Palace of Culture for Educators and a unique historical landmark in St. Petersburg).[6]

There is an apparent parallel between the stories of Gogol and Erofeev. The hagiographical and Biblical allusions serve as an important source for the protagonists of both "Galoshes" and "The Overcoat". The protagonists of both stories and their circumstances are reminiscent to those of a holy-fool from the saints' lives, and likewise to the protagonists of Tolstaia and Petrushevskaia's narratives. They are disliked and misunderstood in this alien world. Like many holy fools and other followers of Christ, they are opposed to the world of cruelty, egoism, indifference, and spiritual emptiness. The little martyr-boy from the story "Galoshes" as well as Akakii Akakievich from "The Overcoat" follows the Christian ideal of non-resistance, humility and acceptance of suffering.

This chapter has shown how the postmodernist writer, essayist and literary critic Viktor Erofeev revisits hagiographical traditions in his writings. The analysis of his short story "Galoshes" demonstrates that Erofeev draws upon many themes that exist within the framework of Old Russian literature. The Christian myth is employed in his story as a repository of important moral values. The concepts of forgiveness, non-resistance to violence, and acceptance of suffering and death, the fundamentals of hagiography and Biblical writings, are activated by means of direct and indirect allusions in order to draw contemporary society's attention to the nature

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[6] The Yusupov Palace was also the scene of Grigorii Rasputin's death in 1916: he was invited there by Prince Feliks Yusupov, Vladimir Purishkevich (a member of the Duma), and the Grand Duke Dimitry Pavlovich for the express purpose of murder. Rasputin. Poet. Magician. Healer. Prophet. Holy Monk. URL source. Available at http://it.stlawu.edu/~rkreuzer/indv5/rasp.htm. (accessed 29 May 2006).

of its spiritual decay. The secular narrative brings the powerful message of moral rejuvenation to the contemporary "world of evil" and reinstates the traditional Russian spiritual concepts of suffering and martyrdom offer a path to bringing oneself closer to God.

"Galoshes" can be considered an example of the medieval hagiographical genre making its way into contemporary Russian literature. Structured around the opposition of good (personified by a little martyr-boy), and evil, (the embodiment of malevolent power represented by the Principal, Zoia Nikolayevna and the boy's classmates), the story "Galoshes" continues the long-lasting literary tradition of revisiting Russia's religious past.

CONCLUSION

As Margaret Ziolkowski rightly points out, "one should never over-emphasize the gap between the medieval and modern Russian culture" (246). The impact of Old Slavic literature and hagiography in particular, on individual Russian writers and their literary works has been noted and examined by a number of scholars and literary critics. Most of those works, however, are devoted to the analysis of hagiographical traditions in the works of the 19th and early 20th century Russian writers. Ziolkowski, Morris, Murav, Thompson, and Kobets have undertaken insightful studies of exploitation of the hagiographical plots, motifs and images by Pushkin, Gogol, Aleksei K. Tolstoy, K. Ryleev, F. Dostoevsky, Leo Tolstoy, Leskov, Herzen, Chernyshevsky, Gorky, and Pasternak.

This thesis has sought to investigate the use of hagiographical and Biblical motifs in some recent Russian prose. In my view, Russian prose of the post-Soviet period has not been sufficiently examined from this perspective, one that is especially important to fuller understanding of examined literary works.

My research has been an attempt to further explore and expand this area of study by conducting an examination of hagiographical and scriptural discourse in the secular prose of renowned post-Soviet writers Tatiana Tolstaia, Liudmila Petrushevskaia and Viktor Erofeev, who are some of the representatives of the postmodernist literary trend in Russian literature.

I have focused on identifying and interpreting hagiographical motifs, images, literary themes and techniques in the narratives of the abovementioned authors,

through a comparative analysis with the traditional meaning of those concepts in Russian spirituality and Scripture.

I have shown through specific textual examples that post-Soviet writers continue to revisit the fundamental Christian concepts of non-resistance to violence, forgiveness, meekness, and self-sacrifice through direct and indirect allusions incorporated into the body of their narratives.

Moreover, the image of the holy fool, originating from Biblical and hagiographical writings re-emerges in the narratives of Tolstaia and Petrushevskaia.

Having examined scholarly works describing the phenomenon of holy foolishness and its meaning in Russian culture, I have discovered that holy fools represent a peculiar form of Eastern Orthodox asceticism, and is considered to be "the most radical form of Christian kenoticism" (Fedotov). The kenotic idea (the emulation of Christ's extraordinary humility) is the source of all Christian asceticism and, according to Kobets, the kenotic mode includes such essential characteristics as "meekness, self-abasement, humility, obedience, non-resistance and the voluntary acceptance of suffering and even death," intended to provide the person with the means for purifying his or her heart ("The Subject of Christian Asceticism" 661).

The theme of folly and foolishness for Christ's sake appears to be prominent in the New Testament writings. Various sections of the Gospels present the Passion as a sum of mockery, humiliation, derision and apparent powerlessness (Mark 15:29, Matt. 27:29, 39 Luke 23: 35-39). Holy foolishness has been an important part of

Russian religious consciousness for centuries and influenced both secular and ecclesiastic individuals, writers, scholars, and historians.

The first chapter of my thesis is focused on exploration of hagiographical topoi in the narrative of Tatiana Tolstaia "Sonia". While investigating the traditional hagiographical and scriptural motifs of suffering, self-sacrifice and death in this story, I have compared their interpretation with selected hagiographical texts, namely *The Tale of Juliania Lazarevskaia* and *The Life of the Blessed Xenia of St. Petersburg.* I have focused in greater detail on discussing the distinguishing characteristics and spiritual features of holy foolishness as identified by the scholars and analyzed the similarities observable in the complex image of the protagonist in Tolstaia's story.

Based on my study of scholarly works and hagiographical characters, I have discovered that Sonia, the protagonist of the Tolstaia narrative, can in fact be considered a contemporary transformation of the holy fool, which she remarkably resembles by virtue of her external and internal characteristics, mode of being, and her position in society.

In the second chapter, I have explored the symbol-rich narrative of Liudmila Petrushevskaia "Our Crowd," which was written to challenge Russian culture's perception of the intelligentsia as the standard-bearers of integrity and morality.

I have demonstrated that the distinct motifs of hagiographical writings have resurfaced and found their further transformation in the narrative of this post-Soviet writer. The primary focus of this work's investigation has been an interpretation of

the motifs of self-sacrifice and voluntary acceptance of suffering in Petrushevskaia's "Our Crowd" as they are also key motifs in Old Slavic hagiography.

As my examination has shown, the importance that the theme of suffering had derived from both, the personal life experiences of Liudmila Petrushevskaia, and the traditional meaning of suffering and self-sacrifice in Russian spirituality. The cult of martyrdom is an essential component of Russian religious consciousness. The voluntary acceptance of suffering and self-sacrifice are reflected as preeminent Christian values in all hagiographical writings from the medieval period forward. "The Martyrdom Boris and Gleb," one of the earliest East Slavic hagiographical exemplars of "passion-bearing," has been examined as an ideal vehicle to explore the Russian understanding of sainthood in Orthodox antiquity.

The image of the narrator in "Our Crowd," also the protagonist of the story, has been considered in a great detail, since it is associated with a number of the hagiographical themes and motifs. Similar to Sonia in Tolstaia's story, the protagonist/narrator can also be offered up as a representative of the holy fool paradigm by her mode of address and communication, which sets her apart from other people. (As many studies have suggested, the holy fool usually passes judgment on a society, which he or she is nevertheless a member of.)

My examination posits that the protagonist's deliberately scandalous behavior, her affronting directness in speaking against the ugliness in the world around her, and finally, her voluntary acceptance of humiliation and suffering

parallels her mode of behavior with that one practiced by the holy fools, as discussed by scholars and illustrated in the texts of the saints lives.

The motifs of Easter and the Last Supper of Jesus Christ as found in the New Testament, though treated in a secular manner in Petrushevskaia's story, nevertheless represent an indirect Biblical allusion, discussed by Picchio as an attribute of medieval Slavic literature.

My research has shown that the Biblical allusions in the texts of some post-Soviet Russian writers, particularly, Tolstaia, Petrushevskaia, and Viktor Erofeev, are analogous elements in both contemporary and medieval literary works.

From Picchio's article we have discovered that direct and indirect Biblical allusions are essential elements of Old East Slavic literature and constitute the subtext of any hagiographical writing. According to this Italian scholar, finding the underlying Biblical theme and the story used in the medieval text is the key to understand this text. The methodology offered by Picchio has allowed us to search for the motifs and themes on a deeper level in the narratives and demonstrated that the story of Jesus Christ has indeed served as an exemplar of the perfect mode of being.

The Christian concept of non-resistance has been found to occupy a significant place in the narratives of post-Soviet writers. While being present in the prose of Tolstaia and Petrushevskaia, it finds its greatest emphasis and most masterly development in the narrative of another post-Soviet writer and literary critic Viktor Erofeev. I have proceeded in chapter 3 with the examination of his short story

"Galoshes," which in fact, has established to be an adaptation of the hagiographical genre.

The textual and sub-textual analysis has shown that in this story the role of the martyr has been given to a child in order to emphasize the author's belief in the need for moral rejuvenation in contemporary society, which the author considers to be "the world of evil". The post-Soviet writer reinstates the traditional for Russian spirituality doctrine of suffering and martyrdom as the way bringing oneself close to God.

"Galoshes" is abundant with allusions to Scripture and hagiographical motifs and themes. Besides, the abovementioned motif of non-resistance to violence, exemplified by the protagonist of the story, other traditional hagiographical motifs such as foretelling and prophecy, are articulated in "Galoshes" through the portrayal of the boy's ability to see the future of his classmates, who persecute and humiliate him.

My examination of Erofeev's story has also brought to light an unexpected but remarkable typological similarity between this narrative and the well-known story of the renowned nineteenth century Russian writer Nikolai Gogol, "The Overcoat". For my purposes, the linkage between these two stories is significant since hagiographical motifs and themes constitute the core meaning in the both stories. However, while religious and hagiographical subtexts in Gogol's story have both been noted and interpreted by a number of scholars during the last 30 years,

Erofeev's work "Galoshes," to my knowledge, has not been explored from this perspective nor has its relation to Gogol's "Overcoat" ever been acknowledged.

As my investigation has demonstrated, all three authors, Tolstaia, Petrushevskaia, and Erofeev, have utilized the already established metaphoric code, whose roots are found in earlier hagiographical writings, to introduce similar themes into more secular works. The three short stories examined in this thesis have acquired their kenotic meaning through religious themes, motifs, and allusions as well as through the images of their protagonists, who resemble ascetic heroes by their personal mode of being.

Among other significant convergences between Old East Slavic writings and the examined works of post-Soviet prose, I have found that similar to the works of hagiography, all three post-Soviet narratives ("Sonia," "Our Crowd" and "Galoshes") are dominated by a dichotomous perspective, which opposes the material and the spiritual, the transient and the eternal as a way of viewing the world. The detailed examination of these stories has demonstrated that the clear opposition of good to evil governs all three narratives on a conceptual level that connects them to the writings of Old Russian literature, the saints lives in particular, in which the world is strictly divided into material and spiritual, reflecting the medieval binary view of the world.

Having studied a number of available critical and literary works, I have come to the conclusion that hagiography has always been a prominent medium for the expression of a variety of moral, social, political and other concerns by later writers.

Hagiographical and Biblical writings provided spiritual models worthy of description and emulation for many writers of various epochs.

My research has shown that the genre of hagiography has afforded medieval as well as contemporary writers the opportunity to explore a wide range of deductive motifs and themes through a re-visitation and reinterpretation of hagiographical and Biblical episodes, the use by traditional of medieval literature poetic devices and even adaptation of portions of hagiographical narratives and their characters.

In conclusion, the present work demonstrates that the traditions of Old Slavic literature continue to play an important role in the formation of current literary works. Their motifs, themes, and poetics have been utilized at the subtext level of the works of post-Soviet writers. I hope that my discussions on the comparisons between contemporary Russian prose and the texts of the old genre of hagiography will serve as a starting point for further exploration of the traditions of Old Slavic Russian literature in the post-Soviet fiction.

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